


**BUILDERS  
OF  
MODERN  
INDIA**

**U. TIROT SINGH**

**Dr. U. HAMLET BAREH**







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U. HAMLET BAREH

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## PREFACE

In 1977 the Meghalaya Government laid down the scheme to prepare the biography of Freedom Fighters of the State. The scheme could not be executed in right earnest owing to the dearth of writers. I was thus invited to prepare Tirot Singh's biography.

U Tirot Singh occupies a predominant place in the history of India's Freedom struggle. Yet very little was known about him up-till Independence. My acquaintance with the subject became deeper on the occasion of the unveiling ceremony of Tirot Singh Memorial at Mairang on March 29, 1954 before I joined the M.A. Course of the Gauhati University. This festival and colourful memorial function became an immense source of inspiration and my interest became widened out to the various aspects of history and ethnology.

While preparing my doctoral dissertation on the *history and culture of the Khasi people*, I made special endeavour to focus our Freedom struggle and devoted 55 pages to this subject. It is hoped that this biography would give consistent interpretation and, therefore, would have scope to include other additional particulars towards enriching its themes and contents. Those materials recently collected would be of greater significance.

The history of Tirot Singh's struggle could not become complete unless the repercussion of this movement is dealt in with greater details. Hence, efforts have been made to deal them with in the last chapter.

I have also evaluated this movement more as a diplomatic struggle amidst two contemporary figures, David Scott and Tirot Singh and the forces to which both were subservient. It is, therefore, hoped that this biography will focus Tirot Singh's place in the National Scheme of Freedom Fighters.



A biography is a dedication to a hero well versed in the social and cultural traditions. It is intended to throw realistic reflections upon such an illustrious personage, his character, deeds and achievements but to be true to life, it holds good of his taste, habits and hobbies, worth of being emulated by his admirers. Care is also necessary that any biography should not be superfluous as to lead to any kind of a blind hero worship.

U. Tirot Singh earns the title of a true freedom fighter. He had contributions in other fields too, especially in imparting trade and other incentives to his people. The preliminary contact which the Khasi Hills had at his time with the British Government, indeed put restraints upon him to widen the scope of any reforms from being executed although the tradition says that his great contemporaries were trying to pick up good lessons from the British administration with a view to enriching their own life. Tirot Singh occupies the place of a leading statesman in being able to build up the solidarity of the Khasis and taking up a joint cause with Assam and the North East at the time they were hard pressed with the challenges from the East India Company. But Tirot Singh had foreseen a series of social changes which might lead to some distortion with the experience gained of the British pressure. The social reforms which should adjust the society to such changes would no doubt have subsequent role.

Confronted with many limitations, I have tried to focus the contemporary social conditions which would be of relevance only to this biography. I found myself engrossed with difficulties since several traditions have become forgotten, but I have taken measures whatever possible to perpetuate the living ones. I have made use of all the available Government records side by side with the traditions to do justice to the subject. But a biography is not an end in itself. Our task lies ahead and what remains to be done is that we should take concrete example, and orient Tirot Singh as would be fitting in to the present age.

We may also mention that Tirot Singh represents the matrilineal social system, not only matrilineal are the laws of inheritance but also the laws of succession to kingly offices. They are, there-

fore, unique. But in the liberation movement, he was joined not only by his country men but also his neighbours.

And for the rest, I leave it to the readers to judge its merit while I would welcome any constructive suggestion towards improvement as and when it saw its light.

I convey my special thanks to the Publications Division, Government of India for their scheme to contain this in their Builders of Modern India series.

I acknowledge my sense of appreciation to Miss Fatima M. Khriam, U Khlur Mangkara Wahlang and U Lancaster Kharwanlang, for the help in taking down dictations and typing out the first manuscript and U.R.D. Shabong and Mrs. D. Massar for typing the revised manuscript.

U. HAMLET BAREH

Shillong

Dated Nailur (January) 15, 1982.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

U. Hamlet Bareh was born on January 1, 1934 and brought up at Shillong. Starting his career as a Lecturer in a local College, U Hamlet Bareh, on being awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy on his Thesis : THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE KHASI PEOPLE by the University of Gauhati, held the post of Editor, District Gazetteers, NEFA and Nagaland from 1965 to 1973 after which he joined the Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Simla as its visiting Fellow. In 1974, he joined the North-eastern Hill University, Shillong as Reader in the Department of Continuing Education and served in that capacity till 1977 when he was appointed Reader-in-Charge of the Centre for Creative Arts in that University.

A scholar of repute, his most important works are the following :

- (1) *A short History of Khasi Literature*, 1962 revised and enlarged 1969 and 1979 editions;
- (2) *Khosi Democracy*, 1963;
- (3) *The History and Culture of the Khasi, People*, 1967 revised and enlarged edition now under print by the United Publishers;
- (4) *Meghalaya* 1974 published by the north-eastern News and Feature service;
- (5) *Khasi Fables and folk-tales* 1971 published by K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta;
- (6) *The Language and Literature of Meghalaya* 1977, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashpatri Nivas, Simla ;
- (7) *Improved Instruction in Khasi*, 1977 NEHU, Shillong;
- (8) *The Art of Parenthood and Art Appreciation*, 1978 NEHU Shillong; and
- (9) *A Report on Creative Art Training*, 1982, NEHU, Shillong :

Besides a number of articles concerning the ethnic groups and cultural trends in the North-Eastern Region have been published in the different books and journals. He also actively participated at the important National and International Seminars and Conferences. Mention may be made of his article *U Kiang Nongbah* an ardent Meghalaya's freedom fighter which has appeared in the *Bibliography of National Dictionary*, Vol. II, Indian Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta in 1973-74.

Dr. Bareh is serving in different capacities in the various socio educational institutions and associations. An artist of some calibre, he composes imogenous Khasi tunes and music. He prepared the screen-play and directed the first censored Khasi Film partly colour in 35 mm, 2,238' 45 metres 7 reels which focuses the Alliance of Thirty Khasi kings who resisted advent of the East India Company from 1780 till 1810 A.D., preparatory to the rise of U. Tirot Singh from 1826 to 1833 whose work as an eminent freedom fighter has been inscribed in the pages of this biography. The film has already been exhibited at the cinema houses in Meghalaya in March-April, 1982.

Creative and versatile, he has immense contributions not only in literature and education but in other respects connected with the socio-economic and civic reconstruction of the people in Meghalaya and the North-east.

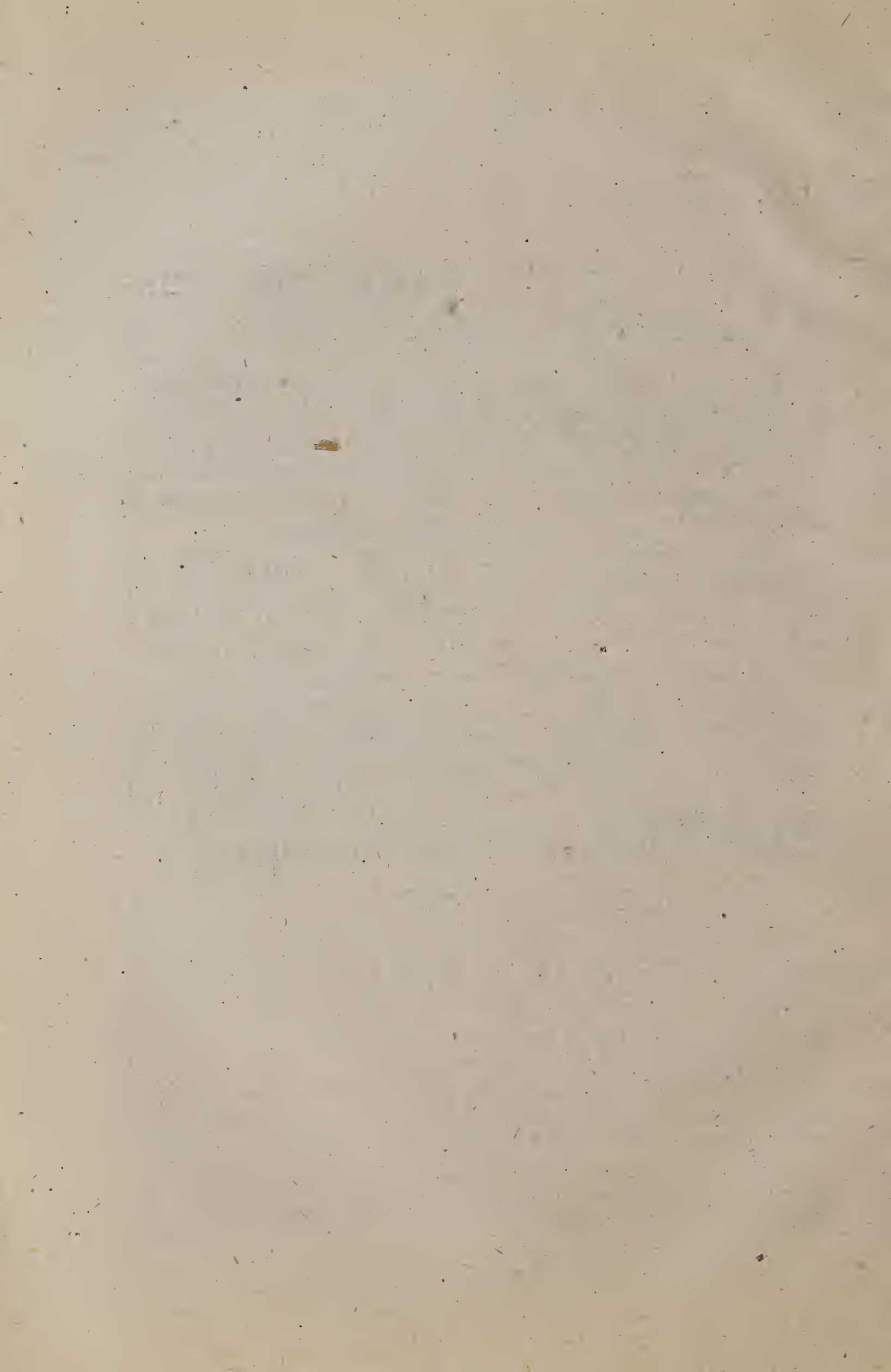
## ABOUT THE SERIES

The object of the Builders of Modern India series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The biographies are planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people of repute and giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life and activities of the eminent leaders and of their times. They are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to different people. It has, therefore, not been possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this series.

Shri R. R. Diwakar is the General Editor of the series.





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## Historical background of Nongkhlaw Kingdom over which U. Tirot Singh Ruled

NONGKHLAW WAS AN illustrious Khasi Kingdom that produced an immortal freedom fighter, U. Tirot Singh. It is located in the mid-western Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. Like the neighbouring States, it abounds in picturesque landscape and charming scenery. It comprised, at the time of Tirot Singh, almost a hundred villages.

Its ancient history is shrouded in obscurity. Tradition has it that in the remote distant past, there lived at Nongkhlaw a certain forgotten folk who, in course of time, was superseded by the Khasi immigrants who came west from the Jaintia Hills. For certain reasons, these people had left their homeland and came west to Nongkhlaw. The migration of the people from east to west is an important feature of the Khasi history. The immigrants came in batches over a period of time. During the course of their settlement many States were formed. They came both by hills and plains, the latter being a more circuitous route in which they passed first through the North Cachar Hills, and then emerged into the Nowgong and Kamrup plains before finally they came up to the western hills, the former route on the other hand, being straight, is shorter.

Since its formation, Nongkhlaw had produced brilliant kings who managed to annex several territories to their State both by conquest and diplomacy. U. Shahjer was the first Nongkhlaw

king who came from the Jaintia Hills and who belonged to the Sutnga (Jaintia) royal family<sup>1</sup> who had ruled the Jaintia Hills and the outlying territories in Cachar Hills and Cachar District of Assam in the east, a portion of the Nowgong plains in Assam on the north and a large territory in present Bangladesh known as the Jaintia Pargannas. He came with his sister, Ka Shaphlong.

Prior to U Shahjer's advent in Nongkhlaw the region was administered by eight chieftains known as Lyngdohs.<sup>2</sup> Like Shahjer they too were originally inhabitants of Jaintia Hills who foresook Sutnga and came west by the same route. Later on Shahjer came via Cachar Hills, Nowgong and Kamrup plains. Tradition says that the eight Lyngdohs and other parties came that far from Sutnga in search of iron-pyrites for iron-smelting and good cultivable lands. They had flourishing trade and commerce with the Ahoms in Assam and Bengalees in present Bangladesh.

Shahjer, on leaving the hills, came to the plains and travelling westward reached Kamrup where, at Bardwar at the foot of Nongkhlaw hills, he was compelled to fight U Don. U Don later made peace in which he promised to part away Bardwar to Shahjer. Subsequently the Ahoms went back on their promise. Shahjer then marched up to Nongkhlaw and sought the help of the eight Lyngdohs to wrest Bardwar from the Ahoms. With their help Bardwar was recovered.

The eight Lyngdohs later combined and by a pact they agreed to form a State with Shahjer as the first Syiem. Having learnt of his royal background other villages came to join the State of the eight Lyngdohs. Shahjer was crowned the Syiem; his sister, Ka Shaphlong, became the first Syiem-Sad whereas the

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<sup>1</sup>Until today Nongkhlaw and Sutnga Syiems claim kingship.

<sup>2</sup>A Lyngdoh means a priest who performs State, village and household ceremonies. The eight Lyngdohs on the other hand were purely administrative heads with little or nominal religious functions and were known as *Lyngdoh nongsynshar*. The eight units prior to Shahjer's arrival were known as *Lyngdohship*.



eight Lyngdohs became the Myntris.

Tradition says that about 25 generations separated the first Syiem Shahjer from Tirot Singh's accession. They were powerful Syiems. Deputy or viceregent Syiems were installed at other centres to govern on behalf of the paramount Syiems. The early Syiems with their Myntris were known to have taken measures for promoting trade, industry, iron-smelting and other activities besides running day-to-day administration.<sup>1</sup>

An early Syiem was U Syntiew who was reputed to have overrun several territories including the Nongshai syiemship (modern Nongpoh) and Sohiong. Another renowned Syiem, U Kongthoh, found fields for exploits toward the south and subdued the villages of Mawmluh and Sohrarim. Until today, *U maw kongthoh* (Kongthoh's stone) is still to be seen at Mawmluh near Sohra (Cherrapunjee) which marked the limits of his exploits. Other great Syiems mentioned in the annals were Laitlyngka I and Laitlyngka II who succeeded in annexing a portion of the territory located east and south of Sohra. Other Syiems took interest in wresting neighbouring villages close to Nongkhlaw itself such as Maw Maram, Pyndem Umiong and Mairang (present state

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<sup>1</sup>In the indigenous political conception, the State had its respective sphere of jurisdiction, the units their own. The Syiem, his Myntris and other headmen formed a supreme court with both original and appellate jurisdiction. The special durbar formed of such dignitaries controlled subjects such as defence, external affairs, markets and communications. The Syiem had no charge over lands, except crown—lands. The state was divided into communes, each headed by a Lyngdoh who administered it through a local durbar. Such a durbar also organised community work, settled cases levied fines and supervised trade and general administration. On behalf of the Syiem, they raised a police force and organised a militia. Coronation and cremation ceremonies of deceased Syiems (both male and female) and other festivals were instituted to forge a close union between the communes and the Syiem. The Syiem's source of income was derived from small bazar imposts, levies from distilleries and judicial fines. The Syiem-sad owing to the matrilineal laws of inheritance obtained a unique authority of being the female custodian of state ceremonies. She was a close female relative of the Syiem.



headquarters) from other chiefs. U Doi, U Jom and U Ram Sing are known to have annexed these territories. Stories are told of great women Syiems such as Ka Sanglar and Ka Jem who displayed brilliant statesmanship in keeping the state's integrity and solidarity intact. In course of time the kingdom's frontiers were vastly extended.

The Myntris were elected from the respective hereditary families just as the Syiem was elected from the royal family by a special State electoral council. In case this council failed to decide upon the nomination of the Syiem, the full Syiemship Durbar decided this issue. All councillors, male persons and adults above 18 or 20 years of age were entitled to participate and vote at the Durbar.

Nongkhlaw Syiems are also known as *Ki Syiem-Khad saw phra* after the 14 units joined subsequently to the State (apart from the original eight lyngdohships). *Khadsaw* however applied to the lower region located on the present Bangladesh border which comprised Shella and other villages. Nongkhlaw Syiems adopted the title of *Ki Syiem-lieh*, White or Dhollah Rajahs to distinguish them from *Ki Syiem-iong*, Black or Kalah Rajahs who held sway over Nongspung and other States.<sup>1</sup>

Tradition has it that at one time the eastern and southern parts of Nongkhlaw were looked after by *Syiem-shnats* (vice-regent kings) stationed at centres such as Sohiong, Mawmluh, Sohra and Shella. One tradition particularly recounts that most of these territories were abandoned later by Nongkhlaw Syiems because the area was too rugged and also because of the difficulties in communication. The Nongkhlaw Syiems ceded, as special gift, several villages located on the south to Sohra State after its inception. Two warriors of Sohra named U Lah and U Lar Kynta subdued one Nongkhlaw viceregent Syiem named U Laitlyngka whose defeat or death was cleverly exploited for the formation of Sohra State. Another new entity, namely Shella, came into being.

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<sup>1</sup>In several States such as Nong ohphoh, Nongstoin and Maram, the syiemlich and syiemlong administer jointly.



There is also a story of a Nongkhlaw viceregent Syiem who found it too difficult to administer a far-flung territory properly owing to the difficulty in communication, the barrenness of the soil and problems of trade. This Syiem, named U Syiem Nongrang Nongrmai, thereupon decided to gift away part of the country known as Khadar and Khadhynriew shnong to U Dem Phanbuh of Sohra as a token of deep friendship. The area which contained *Lai iewbah* (the three big markets) and *Lai iewrit* (three small markets) was accordingly acceded to Sohra. Bulk of this territory in the middle and eastern regions was abandoned and only the principal trade centres such as Sohrarim and Mawmluh were retained by Nongkhlaw State. In the final arrangement a viceregent Syiem with three Myntris was placed at Mawmluh, known as the great centre of iron industry.

One tradition has it that U Tirot Singh hailed from the Mawmluh royal family which offered stiff resistance to British advent. He waged a war in 1829 in consequence of that belligerency this region was wrested from Nongkhlaw to be administered as a British area. The Nongkhlaw Syiems abandoned Shella which later developed into an entity known as Sahdadarship to distinguish it from Syiemship. In spite of the exclusion of vast areas located on the south, Nongkhlaw still formed an extensive kingdom starting from Bardwar in Kamrup and stretching into proper Nongkhlaw which then aligned itself eastwardly where Sohrarim was located and then, with gaps, its southernmost boundary terminated in the present Bangladesh territory which comprised Dewanganj and Rakhubir. Tradition clearly indicates that the Nongkhlaw Syiems made over territories to new States as a gesture of goodwill and friendship.<sup>1</sup>

The last renowned Syiem was U Konrai who died in 1826. He preceded Tirot Singh. It was during his reign that the Mawmluh rebellion occurred. Mawmluh was one of the principal iron-smelting centres in the hills. In fact considerable articles of iron trade passed daily from Mawmluh to many places in Surma

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<sup>1</sup>Extra territorial rights of passage and trade were granted by all Khasi States to citizens from the other States.



valley. This rebellion seems to have taken place just on the eve of the Burmese invasion. Hain Singh viceregent of Mawmluh raised this standard of rebellion with a view to severing all links with the paramount Syiem of Nongkhlaw.

About the circumstances of the revolt it is said that iron merchants of the plains reported to Nongkhlaw about the inferior grade of iron and other smithery goods which Mawmluh had lately supplied them whereas, by a previous pact, the high quality of these goods had been guaranteed. The merchants complained that this was a violation of conditions stipulated in the pact. On learning of this, Konrai Syiem issued instructions to replace such goods with better ones. Hain Sing not only defied these instructions but went further to declare Mawmluh independent of Nongkhlaw.

Konrai thereupon marched to Mawmluh to resume negotiations but Hain Sing, his two Myntris and the rest of the population eluded him and refused to come out. One Mawmluh Myntri however sided with Konrai. A siege was laid against Hain Sing and his people. The village was stormed to the extent that Hain Sing at length sought to escape through one village exit along with his other loyal inhabitants to another place called Laitkynsew. They made an uphill climb to Laitkynsew but Konrai's warriors gave them chase. Hain Sing was thus finally compelled to surrender. At an armistice in which headmen from several villages came to witness, Hain Sing insisted on staying at Laitkynsew and never going back to Mawmluh. The neighbouring villagers in recognition of this unique peace treaty and as a gesture of goodwill made over Laitkynsew to Hain Sing. The area has fruit, arecanut and betel plantations. Thus Laitkynsew was added to Nongkhlaw.

It should be noted that Kyllup, Tirot Singh's distant uncle hailed from Laitkynsew who offered a great deal of resistance to the British advent in 1829. Tradition says that Tirot Singh spent for a considerable period of his childhood at Laitkynsew and received special training from his uncle, Kyllup and other veterans concerned with imparting education to Syiems in many fields.

## Relations with Other States

ON THE 1ST JANUARY 1903, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India addressed to U Raja Kine Singh of Nongkhlaw<sup>1</sup> thus : You represent one of the most important of Khasi States, and bear to reputation of a sagacious and kindly ruler, liked by your people and respected by the officers of the Government.

‘There are people still alive in these hills who can remember the days before you took your place with the circle of the great British empire, for hardly seventy years have passed since the flag of the empire was first planted here. Not without courageous fighting and there is much to the credit of your Nation in regard to the long struggle which, however, lamentably commenced, exhibited the bravery and endurance of Tirot Singh of Nongkhlaw.’

Thus Tirot Singh’s ancestors proved themselves to be great personages, and until the British advent, Nongkhlaw was ruled by powerful Kings.

During the subsequent invasion by the British Government, Nongkhlaw played a vital role in organising a Confederacy to defend the freedom of their land. It is believed that Nongkhlaw Syiems had entered into various defence and trade pacts with the southern states. We mention here some other important developments during the childhood of Tirot Singh.

Assam and the neighbouring territories had been affected largely by the Burmese invasion which occurred from 1818 to

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<sup>1</sup>On the occasion when U Kine Singh was awarded the title of U Rajah by the Government.



1826. Some of the Khasi Rajahs who ruled in the plain area south of the river Brahmaputra, had suffered too on account of the invasion. According to the record, 'some of these Rajahs lost possession in Assam on the expulsion of the Burmese, for having taken part with them against the British, in the wars of 1825.'<sup>1</sup> It was on this occasion that U Konrai was obliged to lose Bardwar first to the Burmese and then to the British Government after the former were expelled from the Assam Valley. Thus, Bardwar, one of the great Khasi entrepots, was lost by Nongkhlaw to the British Government. The States other than Bardwar which suffered this fate were Dumurua, Mawrapur, Pantan, Changong, Boke, Bongong, Boka and Luki, all located in the Assam plains which belonged to the Khasi Kings. It was for this reason that all these Syiems on the north and the dwars joined Tirot Singh in the war that broke out in 1829.

Looking back, we find that the Khasis, in the event of foreign invasions knocking at their doors, took full advantage of such situation, to stand unitedly and resist the common enemy as one man. Stories are still told of several Muslim invasions of Assam which sought passage through the Khasi hills but they were successfully routed and repulsed by strong confederacies formed by the powerful Syiems which enabled the later to save not only the hills but also the rest of North-East India. We know that during one such invasion, one canon of Emperor Shershah was captured by the Jaintias and Mir Jumla himself was defeated when making a second invasion of Assam through Khasi Hills and that his troops were routed by a league sponsored by Shella. The forthcoming British invasion which threatened their existence, also served their cause to unite against the Government.

An important tradition, on this point, recounts that one deposed Assamese King Chandra Kant, on the occasion of the Burmese invasion, invited Bor Manik<sup>2</sup> of Shillong, another renowned

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<sup>1</sup>Pol. Progs 24th and 25th July 1836 Vol. 854 No. 88 cd.

<sup>2</sup>This tradition was collected from Mr. Sporso Manik Syiem, Descendant or U Bor Manik.

Kingdom to help Assam repulse the Burmese. This tradition remembers that Bor Manik, having prepared for this, collected his troops and set out from Kynton Iewduh, near Mawprem, in the present Shillong town to Assam.

It appears on the eve of the British advent, Nongkhlaw's relations with most of the neighbouring States were amicable except with Sohra and Nongwar or Rani on account of a long border dispute which had developed since some time past. The relations became embittered because of repeated efforts made by the Sohra authorities to shelter rebels from Nongkhlaw who escaped to Sohra and received asylum there. We recall in this connection, one prince of Nongkhlaw named U Laitlyngka, who was killed by two warriors from Sohra. In such circumstances, Sohra clung tenaciously to an anti-Nongkhlaw attitude and this was the reason why U Duwan, the contemporary Syiem of Sohra sided with the British Government during the war which broke out in 1829 whereas, the other Syiems rendered full assistance to Nongkhlaw to fight with the British. We should, however, remember that in spite of a few Syiems' siding with the British Government in the liberation war that broke out in 1829, the people of these states were on the side of U Tirot and his compatriots.



## Earliest Anglo-Khasi Relations

SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT of the East India Company's rule in 1765 at Sylhet, which had been obtained as a Dewani from the Mogul Emperor, the British government had relations with the southern Khasis. The earliest British administrators noted that the Khasis employed many Bengalee clerks to maintain their accounts. The advent of the British administrations close to their territories led to new developments in which conflicts were inevitable. The following is an account in which such clashes are recorded.

"The earliest known conflict occurred in March 1772, when a punitive expedition was despatched by the East India Company in coordination with the Sylhet Directorate in consequence of the raids perpetrated by the Jaintias in plundering the boats laden with merchandise plying on the river Surma. The engagement, however, was localised in Jaintiapur and no advance was made into the hills. The Jaintia Syiem was forced to pay an indemnity of Rs. 15,000 and promised not to obstruct passage in future to boatmen. The outcome of the conflict was important leading to a survey of boundaries.

During the winter of 1783, the Shella warriors raided the plains and sacked a market at Ishamati. The Sirders of 137 villages at Sylhet plains also perpetrated raids against their neighbours. U Buh Sing Syiem of Mawsmmai was known to have conducted such raids and the British authorities were said to be taking steps later on to enter into a pact with the Khasis by influencing him and the other Kings to restraint from causing raids

into the East India Company's dominions. This scheme, however, did not materialise.

In 1778, the Khasis of the lower range perpetrated a raid at Selberi-Bansiakerah in which nearly 300 persons lost their lives. On that occasion, the area including Saikar Bandeogah and Betal Purgannah was devastated. Thereupon the British Government posted 50 men to strengthen the Zamindars' force entrusted with the defence of the area from the raids of the hillmen. Later on Lieutenant Davilson with a garrison of 100 men were stationed, who succeeded in repelling the raid on October 26, 1778.<sup>1</sup>

Then in 1789, Kongka Rajah of Shella, a southern State, launched another raid in which the family of Burro Gohain was cruelly murdered. It is mentioned that this Kongka in conjunction with the Zamindar of Dewallah, sought in every way possible to make daring raids upon the East India Company's dominions, 'plundering and seizing every man and boat passing up and down the Surma'. The record mentions that many Khasis rented lands from the local Zamindars and having taken the lands, caused troubles between the Zamindars and the local administration. This practice, the record says, "of letting out and selling lands to Cosseahs had been adopted by many of the Sylhet Zamindars and this was extremely injurious to Company's interests."<sup>2</sup> Another report has it that "these lands were either forcibly seized, or obtained by operating upon the fears of the original proprietors, at a very inadequate price and while in possession of the Cosseahs, no revenue was paid to the Government or to the real proprietors when the lands were cultivated."<sup>3</sup> In course of time, the relations became yet worse. This was one of the reasons why many of the southern chiefs sided with U Tirot Singh when the British Government embarked on an expansionist policy into the hills.

In 1795 another conflict occurred. Almost all the southern

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<sup>1</sup>1787-88 Board of Revenue, Paper, file No. 24, No. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Board of Revenue No. 33, Serial No. 2 1789, Report of J. Willes, collector.

<sup>3</sup>File No. 55 Serial No. 4 1792 (Board of Revenue) May 1792.



Syiems repeated these raids on the eve of British advent. They played fears upon the local Zamindars who were faced with various difficulties to render regular revenue to the Government. These events greatly complicated the administrative machinery.

An account of a folk-tale as I have noted in a book entitled the *Language and Literature of Meghalaya* may be relevant in this regard :

“The Southern Khasis started to fight with the British Government much earlier, dating back to 1765 after the East India Company acquired Sylhet from the Mughal Emperor as a Dewani. They had been in the field sixty years before U Tirot Singh. This brought the Company in conflict with the Khasis. One tradition says that the Government either intentionally or by mistake, encroached upon the territories which belonged to Shella, Maram, Cherra, Sohbar, Mawiang, Bhowal, Jaintia and other States, and the strained relations due to it, had done damage to Khasi trade and administration. This incited the Kings to join hands or perpetrate raids individually to cause havocs in the British areas of Sylhet. During these raids, the Government posts were destroyed, the country was sacked, massacres were perpetrated, and finally the warriors returned home with a large booty. They also dammed the rivers to destroy cultivation. Taxes demanded were not paid. The local inhabitants became sometimes unfortunate victims to this calamity. The Zamindars were forced to stop paying taxes to the Government. An alliance led by U Ksan, Wahadar of Shella, U Buh Singh II of Mawsmi, Queen Ka Wan of Maram, U Phan of Nongstoin and others was formed to re-establish their position in the plains. These were the beginnings of the Khasi freedom struggle—the first phase. The second phase belonged to a warfare conducted by U Tirot Singh and the last phase was of the Anglo-Maram war which occurred from 1833 to 1839. U Tirot Singh of course sought to convert the movement into the North eastern India, having secured support from the Ahoms, the Singphos, the Bhutias, the Garos and others. The tradition also indicated that U Tirot Singh of Nongkhlaw, U Bor Manik of Myllem, U Lar of Myriaw,



U Jibor of Rambrai were committed to fight because the Government after having been stationed in Lower Assam, encroached upon their territory about Kamrup, and it also did not honour its pledge to U Tirot Singh to respect the local customs. So also with Jaintia, it was primarily a boundary dispute which was responsible for the first conflict with the Government with regard to the location of a Jaintia choukey at Chapermukh in Nowgong.

The Khasis, on one occasion, used a trick to assert their authority and re-establish their position in one of their dominions in the plains of Sylhet in which the Government by mistake had made an encroachment. A Myntri of one of the southern States during his State visit, accompanied by a group of dancers, drummers, and criers proceeded to the plain area where the Government had stationed an official. He distributed coins, cowries and alms to the local inhabitants who flocked to him and repaired their allegiances. The visit, unexpected as it was, created sensation and thus the official became aware that the Government had intruded into the territory wrongly and so it withdrew. It was natural that the southern Syiems, in these circumstances, joined U Tirot.

The reminiscence left by Mr. Lindsay, lime merchant and magistrate at Sylhet in 1778 may be found interesting: 'During the few days of my residence at Pandua, I had the uncommon gratification of witnessing a caravan arrive from the interior of the mountain, bringing on their shoulders, from the hills, goods consisting of the coarsest silk from the confines of China, fruits of various kinds, but the great staple was the iron of excellent quality. The tribes in descending from rock to rock as represented in the Oscar and Malvina in the present instance the only descent was steps cut off in the precipice. The burthens were carried by women in the baskets supported by a belt across their forehead, the men walking by their side protecting them with arms . . . . the young girls are both fair and handsome not being allowed the use of betels until after their marriage. The strength of their arms and limbs from constant muscular exercise in ascending and descending these mountains loaded with heavy burthens far exceeded

the ideal'<sup>1</sup>. But Lindsay himself was later on involved in conflicts with the southern chiefs. These were the germs of strained Anglo-Khasi relations from about 1770 to 1820 A.D.

The relations with the East India Company were far from happy. The mountaineers resented that their trading rights were deprived of with the establishment of the East India Company at Sylhet. Some of the Chiefs had already obtained some possessions of lands in and around Sylhet and it thus became possible that clashes in territorial jurisdictions became unavoidable. Some of these relations were noted in a special regulation enforced by Company in 1779, which prohibited the people of Sylhet to arms to the mountaineers and prohibiting them to go up the hills with arms without obtaining the Government permission.

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<sup>1</sup>Lives of Lindsay, Vol.-II, PP. 179-81.



## Tirot Singh at his Accession Antecedents to Accession

TIROT SINGH'S ACCESSION occurred at a time when many events took place following the Burmese withdrawal from and the British occupation of Assam. His predecessor was quite old and death occurred of Konrai Sing King of Nongkhlaw known as Chuttra Singh or Chetra Singh by people living in the plains, around the early part of 1826, very near to the date, the Treaty of Yandabo was drawn up. Tirot Singh, then very young, had lived and seen to the plight of new circumstances.

It may be mentioned that David Scott, Agent to the Governor General, North-Eastern Frontier, had already entered into negotiations with a few Syiems. Syiems with whom contacts were made, were U Ram Singh of Jaintia, Bor Manik of Shillong, Duwan of Sohra and Konrai of Nongkhlaw. In making these contacts, Scott's primary intention was to obtain their permission for a passage from Assam to Sylhet through the hills. Scott was concerned also to obtain military assistance from the Syiems to fight with the Burmese to whom some Syiems had lost their territories while the others Syiems were compelled to declare their allegiance to the Burmese. Jaintia owing to her dominion spread out in the plains, shared the same circumstances arising from the Burmese advent into Sylhet and Assam. Thus, the Burmese general Bandula in 1824 called upon the Jaintia Syiem demanding acts of ceremonial obeissance to the Burmese after an advance was made by the latter near Bodarpur at the eastern extremity of his kingdom in Sylhet side. Ram Singh did not then wish to enter British

protection, but having noted the gravity of the situation, he was at length compelled to conclude a treaty with the British Government on March 10, 1824.

According to the treaty, the Syiem declared his allegiance to the British Government. Moreover, since he had accepted British protection, he had agreed also to have no more political connection with any other power without the consent of the Government. He agreed to render military assistance to Government in the event the latter was engaged in a war against their enemy to the eastward of the river Brahmaputra. The Government had reserved to themselves the right to intervene in the internal affairs of the kingdom in respect of any internal cleavage which appeared likely to affect the safety of the region. The treaty required the Syiem to govern the kingdom in conformity with the ancient usage. There were a few provisions regulating trade relations in that treaty also.

The treaty had been a great asset to David Scott in carrying out his schemes. A road soon was constructed to connect Nowgong and Sylhet. Another road west of Jaintia was also felt necessary to facilitate communication between Sylhet and Assam. For this reason, Scott kept contact with and tried to persuade Bor Manik to grant permission to such a road construction. But the negotiations had not made considerable progress and a treaty to that effect had not concluded.

Scott embarked on negotiations with U Konrai of Nongkhlaw but the scheme was constantly opposed to by his people. U Tirot Singh himself who appeared to be then a Deputy Syiem launched a vigorous opposition. After Konrai's death, Scott cleverly manipulated the affairs by announcing that Bardwar would be restored to Nongkhlaw in exchange for the rights of passage to the Company through Nongkhlaw, for which, Scott was ready to negotiate with Konrai's successor on this issue. It is said at this juncture, Tirot Singh changed his mind and was inclined to accept that attractive offer.

On the other hand, it is difficult to believe that Tirot Singh was so attracted to Mr. Scott's offer to be restored as King of



Nongkhlaw. His acceptance was due to many reasons and we believe that the people of Nongkhlaw had themselves chosen him as they knew he was the only right man for this job especially in respect of tackling the difficult circumstances which the Kingdom was facing.

### **Tirot's Childhood and early life**

His parentage is not clear. We should remember first that the Khasis follow the matrilineal system of inheritance and succession. According to these customs, a demised Syiem was to be succeeded by his elderly uterine brother or any of his brothers living up-till date failing which, the eldest of his sister's sons would rank as the legitimate successor.

Tirot Singh was born in the years between 1780 and 1815. Some persons accepted his date of birth in 1800. The place of his birth is not known. Both the Nongkhlaw and the Mawmluh traditions say that he was born at Mawmluh, being one of the nephews of U Hain Singh, a vicegerent who governed Mawmluh with three myntries—Nongtariang, Diengdoh and Jaid Dkhar Wanlang. The tradition says that Nirot and Tirot the two brothers belonged to the Mawmluh royal clan of Nongkhlaw and at Mawmluh they spent their childhood and received their training there. Mawmluh was then another headquarter of Nongkhlaw. Here till today we see the sepulchres where the bones of the deceased Syiems were laid. I have been told by Mr. A. B. Diengdoh and other informers that the bones of the demised Rajahs even from Nongkhlaw and Mawnai located further west were brought to Mawmluh and assembled together inside these sepulchers for their eternal root. Mawmluh then was the cultural centre. It appears that in this inhabitation there were many veterants in dance, art and martial arts. Its connection with Nongkhlaw was severed shortly after the war broke on when this area was transformed into a British area. Definitely U Hain Singh and U Khyllup were the nearest uncles of U Tirot and from



them, they learnt many things during childhood. In 1826 traditions agreed that Tirot Singh was aged below 25 years at a time he ascended to the throne at Nongkhlaw.

It appears that Konrai King was another avuncular personage who lived until 1826. Konrai's own sister was Ka Ngap who bore maternal cousin relationship to Ka Phet who was mother of Jidor Singh while Ka Ksan's issue was Tirot Singh, the latter being senior to Jidor Singh. Both Tirot Singh and Jidor had grown up close to one another and bore identical taste and interest. Another distant uncle of Jidor was U Khylluck or Khyllup Rajah of Mawmluh who was the Nongkhlaw's Vicegerent.

We do not know who was Tirot Singh's father since some say that he was U Khein-Kongor of either the Nongkynrih or the Wahlang (Pah Syntiew) clan. He was known as a veteran warrior. Tirot's only brother known to us was U Subha Singh but the tradition says his name was Nirot. The latter spent most of his childhood at Mawmluh.

It was customary in those days that young princes should receive good training to prepare themselves for their future careers. Tradition says that Tirot Singh was deformed on the portion of his left arm but he was as good an archer and marksman. The training was in respect of sports, games, warfare, craftsmanship, blacksmithy, iron-smelting and other arts. The people then were physically strong, more muscularly built, of robust constitution and their martial appearance was imposing. Tirot as a prince knew all these trades and arts. He was further to be acquainted with the art of music and dance to fit in with the religious and social functions. He was bound to play a pre-dominant part in State religious festivals in which Ka Syiem-sad (royal priestess) was to assist him in the conduct of sacrifices and rituals. It is said that besides his father known as Kongor (Konwar) and other veterans, Tirot received training from a special instructor named U Rajen and from an Assamese tutor named U Saikya; the former provided him instruction in customary laws while the latter taught



him both written and spoken Assamese in view of their dominions spread out in the Assam plains.<sup>1</sup>

Tirot Singh since childhood proved himself a highly gifted person. He was adept in strategem, diplomacy and warfare. He was a good orator and organiser. He was active, intelligent and energetic. He was acquainted with the state affairs in view of his position as the most senior nephew among the other royal inmates.

Tradition says that Tirot Singh had travelled widely since childhood to help himself acquaint with several affairs of his kingdom and had visited his plains dominions at Bardwar, Bogayee as well as Dewaganj. He had travelled outside his kingdoms and was in touch with other kings deposed both by the Burmese and English men. He was thus acquainted with the judicial, administrative and trade problems of his people. He grew up in the spirit of the democratic institutions dearly loved and cherished by him; he had seen to the various councils and the great orators and debators of that time. He joined the royal parties during their excursions into the far-flung parts of this ancient kingdom and learnt many things from the lips of his valuable guides and counsellors. He was deeply inspired by both his aunts and his own preceptors, who saw in him a promising prince especially in view of the advent of the British empire nearer to them. The Syiems in those days were trained alike to grow up as good judges and administrators. They were bound to be strong personages. Upon them, devolved the mission to keep the solidarity of the State by resorting to such measures, diplomatic or otherwise to do away with any rift. They also looked to the economic welfare of their people.

### **Accession of Tirot Singh**

Circumstances thus impelled Tirot to maintain more contacts with the citizens of the State and neighbours alike. David Scott had indeed manipulated these affairs that Tirot Singh's consent

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<sup>1</sup>The Khasi Kings in those days learnt Bengali, Arabic, Persian in view of their widespread dominions in modern Bangladesh.



was almost obtained to the proposed road construction. In exchange for this, Scott had promised to restore Bardwar to Tirot Singh.<sup>1</sup> This young heir apparent thereupon was bound to refer the matter to a State Durbar because in accordance with the laws of the land, he and his Myntris, had no such power to enter into any treaty with an outside power. A formal convening of the State Durbar was therefore necessary in which the State messengers were to relay this message into all parts of the kingdom and present the tokens of the message by cane rings issued by the Syiem to all heads of circles and villages to symbolise the urgent nature of the meeting. Mr. Scott had already pressed Tirot to allow him to attend the meeting as a special envoy and to see how that proposed treaty would be approved by that Durbar.

Tirot Singh had been extremely busy in consulting the State councillors and headmen. He was, when decided to be the next Syiem, settled at Nongkhlaw where the location of his court and jail is still pointed out. The convicts detained were not only Khasis but were from the other races. He had several policemen and messengers. Blacksmithies at Kynshi, Laitdom and Mawmluh were revitalised for more production of weapons, tools and implements.

The State possessed two houses for the conduct of business. Ka Ing-sad one of these, supervised by the royal priestess, Ka Syiem-sad, was the venue of the annual State Festivals, on which occasions, different delegations from all over the State attended to participate at the rituals, sacrificial offerings and prayers in thanks-giving to their gods. The rituals were admixed with musical interludes in which dancers were draped in colourful costume and adorned with coronets, jewels, earrings, wristlets of pure gold and silver. The *Shlur*, the hall in that house, at times, served as meeting place of the Syiems and Myntris to dispose of urgent works. Sacred posts appropriate from the select species of trees, were donated by the leading citizens. Another house, *Ka Iing Durbar*,

<sup>1</sup>Likewise Scott in an earlier negotiation promised Bor Manik that Desh Dimurua and Kharija mouza would be restored to him on condition that a road construction would be permitted through his kingdom.



formed itself a court and council hall where the Syiem with Myntris, adjudicated judicial sentences and ran day-to-day administration. With this background, let us examine the other circumstances leading to his accession.

Normally the Eight Myntris should be competent to appoint a successor. The succession did not follow strictly the family but the State Council should consider other factors, so that the stability of the Kingdom and the efficiency of the administration should remain intact. The Myntris should unofficially consult the queens and other conspicuous headmen. It appears that the Myntris were unanimous in appointing Tirot Singh as Syiem of Nongkhlaw during the minority of Rijon, then five years old, in which case, Tirot Singh stepped up as regent and the real Rajah, for the period prescribed. Thus Rijon Singh, Tirot Singh's successor wrote, "I am the son of Chuttra Singh Rajah's own sister; on his death, I being a minor, it was with the consent of the Muntrees that Teerut Singh the distantly connected nephew of Chuttra Singh was nominated during my minority. On his death, I being the actual heir of Chuttra Singh, and having obtained my majority I was nominated by the Government with the consent of Muntrees to the Gudee".<sup>1</sup>

If any Myntri's post was vacant, the Syiem's succession could not be decided until the post was filled up so that the full Council resolved upon the issue.

The Rajah's election was also governed by certain conditions. In the event, the Myntris did not reach an unanimous decision, the Sirdars (about 100 in number) came into inter-vene. If they failed, the people (all male adults) took up the matter by voting in an open ground and supporting their respective candidates and the appointment was thus decided by a majority of votes. Counting of heads was the usual usage to decide the number of votes. The Myntris having finally decided, announced their decision to a full State Durbar specially convened and in most cases, the citizens tried their best to agree to such a decision made, except in extra-ordinary circumstances,

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<sup>1</sup>Letters sent to Govt. Vol. No. 21, 1856, No. 72 of 1856.



where such a Durbar used its power to veto the appointment. The decision of the Myntris was announced regarding Tirot Singh's appointment. It appears that an opposition was organised to Tirot Singh's succession as a group of citizens was opposed to the relations then being cultivated with the East India Company, as according to their minds, such relations were not yet due to be formed.

Tirot Singh's accession coincided with the East India Company's advent and perhaps this coincidence made matters more complicated.

Tirot Singh took great interest in trade and industry. Iron-smelting works, it is said, were vitalised and so the other black-smithy enterprises. As a result, iron trade had increased. U Konrai Rajah, on the other hand, the tradition says, introduced the cultivation of lac, cotton and timber work in his State.

Tirot was bound to enter into these negotiations, as otherwise the loss of Bardwar and exclusion of the Khasis from the Dwars, would have adverse effect into his kingdom. Scott had often explained to Tirot Singh the dire need to have such a road in which the latter was compelled to agree. He was to convene the proposed State Durbar and David Scott we have mentioned, consented to come in person to attend it.

In the meantime, Tirot Singh's accession had been announced to the people. His official appointment, however, was to be approved by a full State Durbar and then his investiture would follow. His accession coincided with the first English man's visit into their kingdom.

## Anglo-Khasi Treaty

AT LAST TIROT announced to hold a full State Durbar in November 1826. David Scott, stationed mostly at Gauhati, had already been prepared to make way for the hills a distance of about 60 miles. Mr. Scott was heavily weighed to about 13 or 15 stones, he had engaged two or three mountainers to pull him up. Starting from Bharalmukh near Gauhati, he proceeded to Maligaon below the Kameikha (Kamakhya) hillock and continued on westward to Rani and then Jirang. From below Jirang, the southward climb into the hills started, the climate changing itself from tropical or semi-tropical to the salubrious temperate type. Mr. Scott and his followers set out on November 1, 1826 who after three days' journey reached Nongkhlaw. Tirot had sent in advance messages to all dignitaries, sirdars and powerful village headmen.<sup>1</sup> To the many Durbaris, it was a unique occasion in seeing the first white man in their midst. The same Durbar was also to confirm Tirot Singh's accession to the throne. The English party was deeply fascinated by the charming landscape of the hills. A. White, who was in the Company, was so touched in his spirits as he passed on through the hills

<sup>1</sup>One usage of convening the Durbar was through a crier who made announcement of the Durbar at high pitches to be held, the venue, time and the issue that had to be decided upon. The crier moved about the inhabitation and made loud demonstrations to the accompaniments of drum-beats to signify the importance of the Durbar.

When the King sent messages to distant places, he employed tokens in the form of rings made from the cane, the size of which indicating the urgency of the case. A cut in turn made by the respondent indicated his Acceptance of the message.



and valleys, that his memories were carried to the pastoral grounds of Scotland.

The Councillors formed a circle and took up their seat according to their ranks. The Durbar confirmed Tirot Singh to the throne in a resolution which was expeditiously resolved without delay.<sup>1</sup> The next agenda was the permission of the road construction across Nongkhlaw. It was on this issue that the deliberations, dragged on until midnight and the Durbar had to be adjourned to the morrow to finally decide upon the matter. The record has it as follows :

“The Rajah proceeded to explain the object of the meeting and requested the different orators to express their sentiments on the proposition of the British Government. The leading orator, on the part of opposition, immediately started forth and commenced a long harangue in condemnation of the measure expressed in continuous flow of language accompanied with much animation of manner and appropriate gesticulation. This was replied to by an orator of the Rajah’s party; and in this way the ball was kept up on rolling until evening”. The report goes on like this : “I was struck with astonishment at the order and decorum which characterised this debate. No shouts of exultation, or indecent attempts to put down the orator of the opposite party; on the contrary, every speaker was fairly heard”. To quote this report further : “I have often witnessed the debates in St. Stephen’s Chapel, but those of the Cossya Parliament appeared to me to be conducted with more dignity of manner”.<sup>2</sup>

The debate continued until dusk; its dilatory character however, gave annoyance to Mr. Scott who sought to cut it short as follows : “As it grew dark, the debate not being closed, Mr. Scott rather grew impatient and as had been his wont with the Garrows, ordered a dozen of bottles of rum, to be sent up the

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<sup>1</sup>Cossya was the title adopted by the first English man for Khasis. The Serampore Baptist Mission which made contacts with the people from 1812 to 1838 used the correct nomenclature *Khasi* as is seen from their records.

<sup>2</sup>Memoir of David Scott. pp. 34-37.

hill in the hope of putting an end to it. The liquor was returned with a message saying that they would not drink spirits until they had come to a point at issue. The next morning the debate was resumed; it was continued throughout the day, and closed at midnight in favour of the proposition of the British Government. What the literal arguments of the orators were... I cannot exactly say. The next day the resolution of the Assembly was embodied in a treaty which was concluded with the British Government; and the Cossyas agreeing to aid in the construction of the road which was to pass through their territory”.

The first English officials were no doubt impressed by the high standard of decorum maintained by the Khasis during their deliberations at Durbars which in fact appeared to have no parallel during that time. “The Durbar was conducted with a degree of independence, coolness and propriety which could not have been under similar circumstances by the inhabitants of the most civilised countries.” So the Englishmen thought that the Durbar was a more genuine power than the Rajah himself.



## Character and Personality

TIROT SINGH WAS still young in 1826 aged 20 to 25. With an all round training in administration, diplomacy, strategy, Tirot Singh grew up, loved and admired by his own people. He proved himself a resourceful and energetic King, a benevolent administrator, a shrewd diplomat and a mature statesman. His vice-regal uncle was stationed at Mawhluh to cope with trade and industry. His cousin, Jidor Singh acted as close counsellor. His eight Myntris were all able men. His motto was hard work and discipline, the ideas which he sought to infuse among the citizens. During the war that followed, he proved himself a rare political realist and positivist, inheriting the noblest traditions from his forefathers.

He possessed the sterling qualities of head and heart. A powerful King, yet he followed a simple way of life coupled with the other virtues such as humble disposition, large heartedness, sympathetic understanding and also farsightedness.

Tirot Singh like other contemporary leaders lived with high moral standards. They were clean in every respect and were free from vice such as corruption, lust and covetousness. He was religious-minded in his own way and acquired profound spiritual insight. He held fast his word of honour and expected the same reciprocal attitude from any of his counterparts, a firm believer in the tenets of self-reliance.

He possessed a very strong and charming personality, he was creative, consistent and self-disciplined. He followed progressive policies; deeds not words was the principle he was

dedicated to. Thus he attracted great masses of followers and admirers. With his deep moral insight, he saw to the evils of that time and was dedicated to fight them. Such was the personage of this man. Traditions say that he was unmarried. But one story says that prior to his accession, he was married to one Assamese lady and had children from her.

He was muscularly framed of moderate height his eyes were sharp and penetrating. His forehead was well formed and his dashing personality was permeating. He was fond of wearing a cap and a kilt on ordinary occasions. On the plains when he attended judicial Durbars, he wore a cap which glittered with pearls. At Durbars, Festivals and Court Sessions, he was in the full princely dress, with a turban woven of soft silk threads dyed red, yellow and orange which we call *Ka Khor* and a *Jymphong*, a half sleeveless coat dyed dark hemmed on its front with ornamental designs with button holes and tied with threads. He kept an *errandi* woven shawl. He carried a sword about 4 feet long decked inside a scabbard ornamented here and there with the patches of pure silver. He had a big shield (oval) or *ka tiehbah* about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet in diameter. The Syiems also used silver quivers and other well decorated weapons. Tirot Singh had sets of regal ornaments and jewelleryes which he had inherited from his predecessors. He was bearded and moustached as according to the customs, a moustached person only was physically fit to be a king. In the event a special regency had occurred because of the unavailability of males or because of their minority to succeed to the throne, a woman at Nongkhlaw may be reinstated as the queen but she was only to keep the State until a fully moustached man was obtained. Tirot was equally quick witted. Tradition says he was kind to the Assamese, the Garo and the Bodo people who resided in his kingdom, that was why they all gave him solid support when he launched a war. He was known to be very prompt in discharging his judicial and administrative duties. Thus Tirot although combining the qualities of a statesman and commander, had a zeal to carry out socio-economic and civic reforms. His



magnetic personality was such that with a lightning speed he built up the Khasi alliance which offered tough resistance to their enemy and which in course of time drew more and more allies from the neighbouring countries. It appears that he was free from bureaucratic whims which engaged other kings or zamindars but he freely mixed himself with all sections of the people both nobles and commoners. In his eyes there was no rich and poor. What attracted him most, was talents of persons which could be used to do good work to promote the public welfare. Although he belonged to Nongkhlaw, he took necessary steps to count himself first as a Khasi and that was why the other Syiems felt so much attached to him in forming the alliance.

## Tirot Singh and his Contemporaries

EVEN PRIOR TO the conclusion of the treaty, Tirot had been friendly with many Syiems. He visited near and far kingdoms, and was popular in Assam also. At childhood he had seen some Syiems. The circumstances that occurred, further helped him to win more kings and develop more intimate relations. Ever since those days he foresaw the need for building up a confederation of the Syiems and to attain it, worked hard, during the bloom of his youth. In this he played the role of a political artist. The strained relations which came to occur during the road construction by the East India Company helped him to materialise this scheme and accomplish the noble object of wielding the kingdoms into a confederation and forming a well-knit alliance to resist the British advance. Most of the Syiems came forward and subscribed full support. Tirot Singh lent out assistance to promote trade, economic cooperation and extra-territoriality among the States. He was ready to lead but was inclined to share leadership with veterans who had cultivated interest in the task of reconstruction. The result as we shall see was an upsurge in the hills in which his allies played an illustrious role in that memorable freedom movement.

On account of their roles, it is necessary to examine the other contemporaries of Tirot Singh. They were the following :

- U Ram Singh of Jaintia,
- U Bor Manick II of Shillong,



U Duwan of Sohra,  
 U Ram Singh of Maharam,  
 U Jibor of Rambrai,  
 U Dur Singh kala Rajah of Nongstoin,  
 U Lar of Langrin,  
 U Ador of Mawsynram,  
 U Ksan of Malai Sohmat,  
 U Lar of Myriaw,  
 U Shillong of Nongpoh,  
 U Iang of Nongwah,  
 U Rul Rajah of Boko,  
 U Long of Panbaree,  
 U Sinto and Jubbur Singh of Mikut and Bonggong,  
 U Sumer, U Mihsngi, U Bir and U Ksan, Wahdadars of  
 Shella.

Almost all the kingdoms joined Tirot Singh when the with him and were either pro-British or neutral. Jaintia also with him and were either pro-British or neutral. Jaintia also remained aloof but many Jaintias through Nongpoh and Nongjri furnished invaluable assistance to his men. Tirot was destined to fight with his enemy for which he spent several years to build up the alliance with kings of his kith and kin. But as it occurs in other stories of freedom struggle, he had to fight against the internal enemy thus waging war on two fronts, who had sought to wreck down the unity he had strived to make it and which he undertook at the cost of personal risk and encounters against several hazards, physical or otherwise.

The contemporary situation was so important from the point of giving a consistent biography of U Tirot Singh. So it is relevant that we examine briefly the other contemporary kingdoms which flourished.

Jaintia was the largest among all the Kingdoms, which had three sectors namely Assam, Hills proper and Surma Valley. In the Assam Valley, it comprised Raha, Chuppermukh, Jogi Road, Neli, Sahara and Gobha, whereas the western part of Gobha was held by Shillong whose plains stretched westward

to comprise Sonapur and Beltola. The Hills sector was in the charge of 12 Dalois. The Surma sector comprised the twenty four Jaintia Parganahs starting from Doodpat and Saddler in Cachar District and then along the north bank of Surma river uptill the confines of Sylhet town, in addition to which, an area called the land of Seven Reaches, south of Surma river was included in it which had an excellent alluvial soil. Sometime before the British advent into Sylhet, Mawsmi assisted Jaintia in a war against Shillong for which in recognition of such assistance, a vast tract contiguous from Sylhet known as Angajur and Fatepur, were ceded to the Sohra-Mawsmi Syiem. Sohbar, south of Sohra, at one time, also was subsidiary to Jaintia. U Ram Singh Syiem of Jaintia had cultivated relations with the East India Company. The relations soon became strained on account of disputes centering round the question of Jurisdiction by both contenders—Jaintia and British over the Chowkay ghat at Chuppermukh in modern Assam.

Besides there were hot controversies with regard to jurisdiction of sovereignty in Khasi Dwars located in Assam same as in the case of Nongkhlaw and Shillong but David Scott had already signed an article of treaty agreeing to give the Jaintia Rajah a tract of country in Assam which was never materialised until British annexation of Jaintia which occurred in 1835. Ram Singh died in November 1832 shortly after Mr. Scott's passing away. The most important headquarters were Gobha in Assam, Nartiang in the Hills and Jaintiapur.

The record has it as Nirode K. Boorooah narrates in a book entitled *David Scott in North East India* that the advance of the British in Bengal compelled "the Khasis to retire to their native fastnesses and to leave the town of Sylhet, the villages of Pandua, Chatak and many others which were once their possessions in the hands of their powerful neighbours."<sup>1</sup> The relations which David Scott had maintained with Jaintia turned to become more strained in course of time. The issues that centered round the

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<sup>1</sup>N. K. Boorooah, *David Scott in North-East India*, P-192.



quarrels were not only boundary but they also had bearing on succession issue and renewal of the treaty.

*Shillong* :—Bor Manik II was the then Syiem of Shillong which stretched from the west of river Kolong (Kalanga) in Nowgong to the Umngot river on the south, coterminus to present Bangladesh. It also comprised Desh Dimurus on the Kamrup tract, Panduah and the Langkhat bazar on the south. This kingdom was also known as *Assam Chillong*. It was about 1830 that this kingdom was divided into Myllem and Khyrim in consequence of U Bor Manik's waging of war with the government. But there were other antecedents which led to this split resulting into partition of this kingdom in 1830.

The kingdom in the ages past, had a glorious origin, the ancestress of Shillong royal family being Ka Pah Syntiew, fabled in the tradition, to be the daughter of Shillong god. She had introduced the art of dance and music and taught her people about using gold and silver ornaments adopted at different celebrations in the State festivals. She taught them dyeing and weaving also. The powerful heads of the units later on joined together and crowned her the first queen of this State.

During the first 15 generations known, the kingdom ran on smoothly but in course of time there occurred a rift in the royal house and in the State Assembly in which many wars of succession were fought between two rival Syiem parties, known as Khyrim and Myllem. On one occasion, the Khyrim house was ousted from Nongkseh, the first State headquarters but due to timely intervention of some powerful chiefs, it was again restored. The next war brought about the total collapse of Nongkseh in which the Syiem parties were dispersed to different directions, after which the Myllem house was established at Nongkrem. During this catastrophe, a few scions from the Khyrim house made a timely escape, and were given shelter in Langkyrdem and Khadarblang on the south. U bar Manik



belonged to the Myllem lineage. Bor Manik took steps to reunite Khyrim and Myllem houses and invited Sing Manik, scion from his hideout to join the Syiem party at Nongkrem. Sing Manik was thus restored and reinstated as a Deputy Syiem. Later on Bor Manik aided with Tirot Singh and at the height of the war, the kingdom became partitioned into Khyrim and Myllem States. Bor Manik appears very advanced in age in 1830. He was renowned for his physical prowess. Scott in exploring a road construction, had first made contact with Bor Manik in March 1824.

*Sohra*<sup>1</sup>: U Duwan, quite old in age, was Tirot Singh's contemporary. His predecessors were involved in making raids into Sylhet plains after the British government took possession of Sylhet in 1765. At one time, the kingdom was subject also to an internal cleavage after a dispute between two Syiem parties namely Mawsmi and Sohra had occurred. These circumstances led to the temporary partition. During the Anglo-Khasi war fought from 1829-1832, a Syiem from Mawsmi family, named U Muken, sided with Tirot, whereas U Duwan threw absolute support to the government. Muken became U Tirot's most valued compatriot. It is also known that Scott had traversed from Panduah near Bholaganj in an upward climb to Sohra to seek Sohra's friendship. Scott's witty mind had fully conceived the potential resource and natural wealth of the country but Scott had not done full justice in putting on record the culture, grandeur and heritage and antiquarian remains which several spots he passed through abounded in stalwart stone monuments and dolmens, cromlechs, war trenches and barricades.

*Shella*: This principality (since the Sohthanda Syiem of Nongkhlaw blood relinquished the place) was governed not by the Syiem but by the four elected heads known as the Wahdadars. The Shella wahdadars were also renowned in effecting raids in the nearby plains and fought with the Muslims on previous occasions.

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<sup>1</sup>The earliest British Officers mispronounced Cherra for Sohra which slowly came to be known as Cherrapunjee.



*Maharam* : Two Syiems families Syiemiong (Kala Rajahs) and Syiemlieh (Dhola Rajahs) governed Maharam. Ram Singh, Tirot Singh's contemporary, was preceded by Kobar who reigned during the beginning of the 19th century. Ram Singh considerably assisted Tirot against the government but finally he was compelled to submit in 1832.

*Rambrai* : Jibor, the Rambrai Syiem joined Tirot Singh in the liberation war and persisted in the field for sometime. But afterwards, he was quelled and thus declared himself allegiant to the government. Soon he was murdered in which U Lorshon took up the reins of the administration; he offered stubborn resistance to the government and surrendered nine months after U Tirot Singh was sent in exile to Dacca.

*Nongstoin* : The state was administered by two families Syiemlieh and Syiemiong. The contemporary Syiem was Dur Singh, (*Kala Rajah*). When the war broke out, he at first, remained neutral. When Lorshon of Rambrai formulated a scheme to recover the ancient Khasi *dwars* in Assam from the East India Company's grip in 1831, the Kala Rajah of Nongstoin also joined this campaign which led to the confiscation of his *dwars* in Goalpara District of Assam.

*Langrin* : U Mar Rajah (or U Lar) reigned over Langrin around 1818. Geo Inglis a European lime merchant said that the Langrin Syiem had acute boundary dispute with Nongstoin at the Boglee Chaurrah in the southern foothills and the extent of this dispute had created difficulties to his lease of the limestone quarry which he had executed with Langrin. In September, 1821 a number of Nongstoin tribesmen raided this area and carried off the hills seven men of that company. U Phan Basen brought a letter objecting to the execution of the lease in the area under dispute. The Nongstoin Syiem later on granted a lease of this area to another French merchant.

*Mawsyaram* : Ador was the Mawsyaram Syiem in 1831.

*Malai sohmat* : U Ksan was Tirot's contemporary. He submitted to the government in 1832.

*Myriaw* : U Lar Tirot's contemporary who submitted to the Government in 1829.

*Mawiang* : Tradition is not clear as to the contemporary Syiem. It appears either U Moit or U Makha was the then Syiem. The state remained neutral during the Anglo-Khasi war.

*Nobosohphoh* : It is not clear who the contemporary from this State was. Probably either U Shyrpoi or U Long was the then Syiem.

*Bhowal* : Neither the record nor the tradition has the name of the then reigning syiem.

*Nongshai* : The then Nongshai Syiem is told to have contributed a lot to Tirot Singh's task of liberation. Tradition says he was U Shyllong Syiem.

*Nongwah or Rani* : U Iang or Chowdree Lolit was the contemporary Syiem, who had already been bound at the height of Anglo-Burmese wars to the government. He was hostile to Nongkhlaw and thereupon threw full support to the government against Tirot Singh.

Of all the states, Sohra, Khyrim and Nongwah rendered good deal of assistance to the Government. Mention is also made of Nongstoin, Langrin and Mawiang which were either neutral or allies of the government. But Nongstoin threw support to Lorshon and Tirot during the last stage of the war.

The other nearest contemporaries of Tirot were U Poko Jhalook of Jyrngam and Luki (in the Brahmaputra valley) but part of Luki was also administered by the Rungshee or Nongstoin Syiem, U Long of Panbaree, U Sintoe and Jubbur Singh of Mokut and Bongong and U Ru Rajah of Boko.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the Rambari Syiem also held the Dwars of Pantan, Bogee and Bongong in Kamrup. A Khasi Syiem named Rajah Sadoo Singh held Mawrapur from 1824 to 1827 when he was removed and the Dwar made over to Ramesh Chandra. Nongkhlaw also held Bardwar; it was restored to Tirot but was wrested from him in 1829 to be made over to Muhudur Burua and

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<sup>1</sup>For 1834 Pol. Dept. Con. 22nd May No. 78 Mokut and Nongshai appear to be subsidiary to Nongsoin.



then to Mirza Bundee Ali and again transferred to Muhudur Burua. Then in 1834, it was handed over to Rijon, Tirot Singh's successor. Rijon also obtained charge of Bogoyee.<sup>1</sup> After Tirot's fall, Boko was restored to U Rao. We have reference of Bungong also which was reinstated by the Burmese to a Khasi, Obdiah during the Burmese invasion of Assam but when the British government took over Lower Assam, he absconded and the *dwar* was handed over to an Assamese family. Lookie was also ruled by a Khasi family about 50 years before Tirot's accession. The other Dwars were Bhologanj and Chhygong held by the Khasis before the British advent. These were the main contemporaries in the period up till 1835.

This land until today is called (Ka Ri ki Laiphew Syiem), the realm of thirty Syiems, for if we take to account the number of the paramount kings along with the vicegerent, the royal heads of communes (known as *ki syiem shnat*, *ki syiem raid*) an answer may be found that they totalled thirty Syiems. They also included the Jaintia Syiem who had blood relations with some royal families in other states.

We have given a narrative how Tirot Singh emerged in the North-Eastern Freedom Struggle with reference to his contemporaries. However, we have mentioned that he could not count friendship of all the kings. He had adversaries who had rendered the best possible assistance to the government and who thereby played no insignificant role to subdue this first and foremost movement championed by U Tirot Singh and his friends.

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<sup>1</sup>Pol. Progs. 24th and 25th July, 1836 Vol. 854 No. 88cd.

## Anglo-Khasi Relations (1826-29)

WE HAVE NOTED that the Treaty had not received full support. We have also pointed out that the neighbouring Syiems had looked upon the road construction as something which would deprive them of their independence. Wide apprehensions had therefore gained ground.

Among the Nongkhlaw chiefs, it was learnt that the Lyngdoh of Nongbri was deadly opposed to and even challenged the validity of the treaty because a few other headmen had not been consulted or invited to the Durbar which passed such resolution. In course of time more and more complaints were lodged to Syiem Tirot. By this time, David Scott had embarked upon the road survey. From Gauhati, the road traversed westward to Ranigaon, then aligned upward to Jirang in a southward direction to Nongkhlaw. It continued southwardly to Mawpiah, then Mairang from where it took an eastward curve, then southward to Soharim and Sohra, then descended through the precipitous southern slopes to the foothills and then continued to Chatak. Communication to Sylhet headquarters became easier from Chatak. Marks of this ancient road are still traceable at places such as Lad Mawphlang, and Mawmluh. From the outset, true to the pledge, Tirot provided government with workmen, building materials and other requirements for the road construction. The salubrious climate, the charming landscape and the fertility of the soil were so attractive, that Mr. Scott was conceiving more plan to establish anuaria and convalescent camps in the hills. He had



proposed such schemes to the highest authorities at Fort William and got them done. A convalescent camp was thus raised at Nongkhlaw. Tirot's mother, Ka Ksan, according to John Roberts was friendly to Mr. Scott and they often met during Scott's occasional visits to the hills. Mr. Scott had opened a plantation in which he introduced beans, potato and carrots which was a successful experimentation. Since that time, potato plantation became largely adopted by the natives especially after iron-smelting and iron industry dwindled. The government had already approved of the treaty of 1826 which enabled Mr. Scott to execute his scheme more successfully.

As a mark of honour, Tirot Singh was presented a State *Palankeen* (Kokoradola) as a token of highest respect reserved for the most eminent kings of that time. In these circumstances the road construction was started.

The road construction along with the establishment of certain rest houses on the road side, was, however, resented by the people, especially those who had not been able to get a clear idea of the treaty. The progress of British advance later on tended to breed feelings of jealousy. To make matters worse, N. K. Boorooah writes, news of seizure of markets at Sylhet plains had caused resentment among the Khasis who had reposed confidence in Mr. Scott's word that their trade interest would be fully protected. Moreover, the Nongkhlaw headman resented David Scott's manouvering over this affair in inserting certain additional provisions in the written treaty without even being discussed in the Durbar. For instance, a provision was made that the Sirdars would provide workmen for road building, whereas in fact, this matter was never discussed in the Durbar that approved the treaty.

The coming of the British Administration in Assam, after it had replaced the Burmese and the consequent seizure of Khasi Dwars in the plains, brought about more and more unhappy relations. The possession of the Dwars became a bone of contention amongst them. For instance U Bor Manik of Shillong resented that the British government had not returned

the plains of Dimurua<sup>1</sup> (inhabited by Mikirs, Lalungs and Assamese) and which had been part of this kingdom since time immemorial. In August 1828, U Bor Manik marched down to Dimurua and confiscated the revenue as had been collected by the Government revenue officers whereas, those who refused were threatened to be carried off to the hills. The Khasis took off grains and cattle as booty. Scott, without paying full attention to this complicated matter, despatched a contingent of the Rangpur light infantry and Goalpara subandees to expel the Khasi Gangs from Dumuara. Bor Manik went further in calling upon the other Khasi kings to provide him assistance in the event of a war with the government. Bor Manik from the beginning felt more attached to Tirot in view of the common problem they faced. This also strengthened the bonds of friendship between the two.

Tirot Singh had his own complaints. It is known that the Nongwah or the Rani Syiem had strained relations with Nongkhlaw which centred on boundary disputes. He had previously been the rival of Nongkhlaw in making exploits into the dwars. He had therefore announced himself subsidiary to government, and assured Mr. Scott to pay regular revenue for the Desh-Rani, his Dominion located now in Kamrup District. His headquarters were located both at Patkanj (Patgaon) and Nongbah—Nongwah in the plains and Hills sectors respectively. Balaram closed down his kingdom to the Nongkhlaw traders. Thereupon by a provision of the treaty, Tirot Singh appealed to the government to furnish him military assistance, but Scott, on the contrary, announced that Tirot Singh should pay heavily for the acts of murder and robbery committed on the Nongwah people. Failing to secure such help, thereupon a force was sent to attack Patkanj (Patgaon) but the government intervened on the appeal from the Rani king in which Scott therefore sent Captain White to repulse Tirot Singh. Tirot

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<sup>1</sup>This part of the lowland was known as *Khadar Bongthai*.



also resented that Bardwar had not been restored to Nongkhlaw inspite of Mr. Scott's offer and commitment during their first interview. Thus, Tirot indignantly announced to Mahudur Burua : "Mr. Scott formerly made friendship with me saying 'your enemy is company's enemy', and that he would relinquish the Bardwar revenue both in money and paiks. He had not done it and he has the wish to give troops to my enemy, the Rani Raja to assist him against me."

The other kingdoms had watched this incident with great concern. In fact Tirot had drawn a good deal of sympathy from his countrymen. It was natural that all the Northern and Southern Syiems who had been deprived of their markets and dominions should have had therefore wished to support U Tirot Singh against the Government.

Inside Nongkhlaw there were other events which led to more complications in the relation with the British officers and Sepoys stationed there. Tirot Singh fully realised the vast schemes of government for territorial expansion and the danger of the agreement he had made. News were daily pouring in at the court on the sufferings of the common people against the soldiers' exploitation in that they took away the food stuff and articles from poor sellers without paying for them, in that the sepoys even ill-treated the woodmen and peasants and in that they insulted the labourers in the road construction. They were rude to the villagers and demonstrated themselves in many ways. This led to clashes even before the war commenced.

David Scott had accomplished this road construction within a short time. He had the services of competent officials and was assisted, among others by Mr. Fenwick, contractor. Other officials who accompanied Scott were Dr. Beadon and later on Lt. Beddingfield and Lt. Burlton who stayed at the convalescent camp and also looked after the welfare of the sepoys and guards of the Company's post. The road had covered considerable distance and served the purpose for horse-ride. At the most difficult terrain, part of the road had to be considerably dumped before it could be levelled up, the greater

part of the road being lined up and levelled with stones. It was a successful venture in that the survey and construction were finished within 2 years. But this success was also due to the active cooperation rendered by headmen and their Rajahs.

The Khasis on the other hand, resented that all the help they had extended had not been duly recognised in that they were excluded from the Dwars and were opposed themselves to the annexation Scheme, the Government had been executing, to wrest their plain dominions, some of which had already been attached to the British Districts. Later on, reports came that the sepoys and other officials had been arrogant and behaved very badly with the local inhabitants. The beginning of this hostility, was also due to the "false and foolish speech of a Bengalee Chaprassee, who, in a dispute with the Cossyas, prior to Mr. Scott's coming up, had threatened them with his Master's vengeance, and had plainly told them that it had entered into his mater's plan to subject them to taxation, the same as the inhabitants of the plains". This is what we find as Mr. White leaves it in *Memoir of David Scott*.

A Playwright Victor G. Barel narrates how things had developed to such an extent especially on the relations which turned worse with the soldiers of the lower rank. Thus Mon Bhut a patriot and warrior of U Tirot Singh reported one day to Tirot Singh thus : "These strangers have done only shameful deeds even since they set foot on our soil, and their attitude towards our girls is beyond toleration. This morning I found them chasing after some girls who were cutting wood in the outskirt of the village, and I have killed four of them".<sup>1</sup>

Tirot Singh in anger replied : "I will go to David Scott and I will order him to leave this country with all his men at once."

Mon Bhut further told the King : "their evil deeds do not end there, your Majesty. They created a lot of trouble in the market yesterday also, and took the commodities from our people without paying for their full price. When the people protested, they silenced them with threats, and said that they

<sup>1</sup>Tirot Singh, P. 28—Khasi Drama in English.



will soon become masters of this kingdom; and that the time is coming, when not only our commodities, but our lands will also be taken. I was so enraged that I thrashed many of them yesterday. It served them right”.

The Counsellor or preceptor however advised Tirot Singh thus—“These strangers have gone too far, and I think it is not a wise thing for you to see David Scott after what has happened. He gave his word of honour before the Durbar that our life and customs will never be interfered with by his men, and that he will never encroach upon our lands and our rights. He has not kept his word. Therefore, he and his men should be wiped out of this country by the sword”.

Tirot Singh accepted their advice and felt that no further negotiation with David Scott should take place once the treaty had been violated and once he was no longer treated as the honourable ally and friend of the British Empire. It was not for any such position that Tirot Singh had really coveted, but pressed with such circumstances that had threatened the safety and the integrity not only of his kingdom but also of the thirty Khasi kingdoms, he was now exerting pressure to resist and oppose these intrusive forces and to reinstate the dignity of his people whom he had considered as down-trodden. He had the experience of such a fate due to the high handedness of the sepoy.

Tirot Singh was seen to be engaged in the long arduous struggle for the recovery of the ancient independence. His first antagonist was David Scott, and Tirot was looking forward to tarnish his image since Mr. Scott was instrumental to causing an upheaval to which Nongkhlaw was to be among the first victims. The roles of Scott's followers to him were more supplementary. Truly, the struggle continued uptill Scott's death in 1832, but he died in an unfinished war leaving the rest of this work to be finished by his successors. Later on, Tirot Singh proved himself to be the master mind in conducting strategy and forming defensive alliances with his compatriots in the field.

## An Irrevocable Pledge

WHAT IMPRESSES US was the friendship that grew stronger and stronger between Bor Manik and Tirot Singh. The two kings shared the common experience, faced the common difficulties and held identical interest. Thus they became bosom friends being bound by the common traditions. But firmly believed in the efficacy of democracy, community discipline and constructive statesmanship. Both loved and joined the common sports and games, hunting and fishing excursions and both became war commanders of certain calibre. Both managed to dedicate themselves to the cause of their country. Such a union appears to have no parallel.

A tradition recounts of the other developments. Bor Manik, this story says, was so aggrieved of matter arising from Nongkhlaw's acceptance of a Treaty executed in 1826 which came thus to be held without any information being served to him. Tirot Singh, in order to clear up such misunderstanding that might lead to further disintegrity, thereupon, arranged an interview with Bor Manik. Tirot on an appointed date, came accompanied by his cousin U' Jidor Singh, and when they met, Tirot started the parleys thus: "I have come to express my resentment that I could not inform you earlier about the Durbar held in which our permission had been conveyed to Iskat Saheb,<sup>1</sup> for the road construction across Nongkhlaw. As you suggested, matters had become worse and time might come when we

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<sup>1</sup>*Iskat* appears mispronounced for Scott (David Scott) after a local Bengali usage.



have to take up arms very soon." Bor Manik in reply said : "Time has been late already but please take it for granted that I never wish to distort this unity we have built up for so long by our own sweat. I am rather pleased to learn this so that we could reshape our policy to unite among ourselves and other kings and dedicate ourselves to the defence of our land."<sup>1</sup>

In continuation of this pledge executed between these two great personages, a matrimonial alliance was proposed between Prince Jidor and Tulamai, the Syiem-sad of Shillong, the matter which then was referred to a council of nobles in which their consent was obtained. The two kingdoms were jubilant over the news. U Jidor soon came to Myllem and was married to the Syiem-sad, Tulamai in a colourful ceremony. He was united in accordance with the matrilineal customs, with a branch of the Syiem's family at Madan Iing Syiem (royal campus) at Myllem. The war soon broke out and Jidor Singh moved from place to place to abide constantly with Tirot Singh's direction. Later on Tirot Singh's exile in 1833, he moved to Nongkhlaw and eventually stayed there up-till 1848, the date on which he took charge of the throne of Nongkhlaw and Bardwar from Rijon Singh who was installed after Tirot Singh's death in 1834. Jidor Singh continued to administer Nongkhlaw and Bardwar up-till his death in 1856.

The friendship between Shillong and Nongkhlaw grew stronger and had helped to strengthen the Khasi confederacy organised by Bor Manik and Tirot Singh to resist the government pressure during the wars that were fought from 1829 to 1833. With the whole hearted support and backing up by his family, the citizens and more so the other kings, Tirot Singh would step up to act as champion of the Khasi freedom movement.

In one of the interviews, V. G. Bareh describes how Singh announced "you come in the nick of time. There was

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<sup>1</sup>This story was collected from Mr. Sperso Manik as he had heard and recorded it from his mother, Iramai, daughter of Tulamai and Jidor Singh.

never a time when I needed help as I do now ; your arrival is like a message from the gods themselves. I have been telling my counsellor a few moments ago that our gravest danger lies at Bortula . . . . . We have no more men to send there, for everyone is engaged in this grim battle. Personally, I will have to go down to Sylhet to fight against David Scott. Will you please take command of the Bortula front?"

Bor Manik in reply said, "of course, I am quite ready to go there. As soon as I received your message, I gathered all my warriors, and we are now fully prepared for action."

Tirot Singh bade good bye to U Bor Manik.



## Outbreak of the War

EMPHASIS HAS BEEN laid on the turn of events which had brought about many unhappy relations. Mr. Scott, however, had not examined things in their right perspective; he had not been aware that his policy in keeping with the exclusion of the Khasis from the Dwars had been very much resented by those mountaineers. He took no notice of the growing opposition to the road construction and the arrangement made by the government. On the other hand, not only Tirot and Bor Manik but the Syiems of Rambrai, Myriaw, Jirang, Panbaree and others later on realised the situation and apprehended these developments.

Relations had now become worse with Bor Manik. Having expelled his warriors from the plains in August 1828, Scott demanded from Bor Manik a heavy compensation against his conduct in exacting supplies from the people in Dimurua. Scott threatened also to close down the markets in the plains, in the event Bor Manik failed to respond. He was planning to send a force to Shillong to subdue this great Syiem by availing himself of military help from Jaintia and Nongkhlaw.

Scott's demand upon Bor Manik angered the Khasis so much. Scott demanded from Tirot a revenue in lieu of his claim of Bardwar. Relations became worse. In 1856, Rijon Singh, successor to Tirot Singh observed thus :

'Bur Dooar is in the jurisdiction of Nucklow which is proved by the para papers of the Assam Rajah, and previous orders passed by you. . . . there is no profit in being a Rajah of Nucklow, and this you are aware of, for the Cossiahs are entirely

dependent on their trade with Bur Dooar'. (General proceedings 25 September, 1856; letter addressed to Agent Governor-General by Rajun Singh, Raja of Nucklow and Burdooar).

Scott refused to recognise Shillong's claims to Dimurua since an Assamese collector named Muhudur Burua was appointed to be in charge of several Dwars wrested from the Khasis. To settle matters, Bor Manik therefore sent two of his Myntris to Gauhati to negotiate with and urge upon Scott to restore Desh Dimurua in response to his just and legitimate claims. Scott refused to listen and threw them into prison.

Mr. Scott had not understood seriously these grievances. He underestimated alike their physical strength. Having won the friendship of U Duwan of Sohra he was endeavouring to consolidate the British position in the hills. Both Tirot and Bor Manik, having fallen to such plight were, therefore, determined to make a desperate stand to resist the British advance.

Fallen into this plight, Tirot Singh was asked now and then, why he concluded the treaty in 1826, and why this treaty was so inconsistently placed. Pressed by his own people, he found no other alternative, except to rise in arms against the Government by rallying all the discontented parties in a determined bid to drive away the Britishers from the land. Many other factors combined to bring about general malice and discontent. U Tirot rather than U Bor Manik was destined to begin the hostilities.

A conspiracy was hatched in Nongkhlaw to undo the English officers including David Scott. This would also serve as green signal to the other States. This movement was to be launched during the first week of April 1829. It was a sowing season but the people hardly cared such an opportune time, because, they were now determined to repel the outside intrusion from their land.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Khasis were described thus: "More errant cowards, after all their boastings."

'I never saw a country in which the bow and arrow were so entirely useless, when opposed to fine arms. The only places in which they can fight are holes under the rocks. . . . They had a lesson long ago, in the plains, but still the folly to suppose themselves invincible in the hills; when in reality as compared with the lowlands, the chances are five to one in our favour'. (White, Memoir of David Scott)



A Play-wright, Victor G. Bareh, discovered Tirot Singh addressing his ministers when the war was declared as follows :

“I want no bloodshed; but a curse is creeping into this dear kingdom of mine. It will over-power us unless it is checked. Therefore it should be nipped in the bud. David Scott has violated the covenant of our Durbar, and nothing short of the sword can make full compensation for the damage he has done. Ministers and leaders of my people, rise up the time has come. . . . we fight in the name of our forefathers for our rights, and we must win, clear the kingdom of these strange pests, and remember that death is a happier thing than slavery. . . .

. . . . Counsellor, send words to all the Khasi Syiems and warn them of the trap that David Scott is setting to us. Tell them to join hands with us in this struggle for our rights and liberties and that we should be united at all cost. You may go now and luck be with you all.”<sup>1</sup>

“Iang Singh, get my weapons ready, sharpen and clean that sword of my forefathers. . . . . with a lying tongue and with mean tricks, a stranger tries to dominate my kingdom. With my sword, I will answer him.”

Tirot Singh, in these circumstances, was compelled to organise an offensive alliance against the British Government. His messengers had already approached several Syiems and Rajahs to invite their support to this plan. His state councillors and Myntris had pledged wholehearted support. Bor Manik was constantly engaging himself to advise Tirot Singh on the main plans and operations and was constantly insisting on building an alliance not only of Khasi Syiems but which should enlist the help of their neighbours too.

By taking up arms, Tirot Singh was much relieved of the objections constantly lodged by his countrymen on the terms and conditions which were laid down in the treaty. He got the royal house and his Myntris cleared up of any insinuations in acting like that. He now also saw that his people had recognised him as their liberator. He was aware of the difficulties he would be

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<sup>1</sup>U Tirot Singh (A Khasi drama in English), pp 29-30.

facing owing to the siding of a few Syiems with the Government. He knew that his people rose in arms, the Khasi Hills would be attacked from both Sylhet and Assam side in which a prolonged state of warfare would result. He was, therefore, to be fully prepared to meet these calamities. He was an architect of unity at the time when all the 30 kings had fallen victims to that ill fate.

On April 4, Lieutenants Burlton and Beddingfield were warmly invited to a Durbar convened by Tirot Singh. Beddingfield was well conversant with the people and had learnt the Nongkh-law dialect. He was innocent and took no precaution against dangers. Arriving at a place, he was murdered, after being surrounded and tied up, and then hacked to death.<sup>1</sup> Lt. Burlton had already smelled an air of conspiracy and made efforts to escape; thus with the 60 sepoy's guarding the posts, they fled to Gauhati during that whole gloomy night, to find themselves near the foothills barricaded and laid in wait for by a number of warriors, and in a defence an engagement followed. The warriors lurked in large number. Moreover a heavy downpour considerably weakened his party. The warriors finally captured the whole detachment and put them to death. The tradition recounts that the lives of the Assamese attached to Burlton only were spared at the behest of Tirot Singh.

Incidentally David Scott who had been briefing in the hills, miraculously escaped. One tradition says that Ka Ksan,<sup>2</sup> mother of Tirot Singh, stole at the dead of night to his rest house and

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<sup>1</sup>A surprise attack upon the strangers looked very undesirable. The English Officials considered it as a high breach of faith. Probably the Khasis, largely wounded in their sentiments by gross violation of the European Officers upon their own pledge, saw no other way to rally their own strength and, therefore, carried out these massacres with a view to organising themselves sufficiently and obtain the necessary assistance.

<sup>2</sup>This incident is found in one story included in the Fourth Khasi Reader by Dr. John Roberts.



warned him of the danger on account of this conspiracy hatched by Tirot Singh and his men to kill all the foreigners. She advised him to escape to Sohra instead of Gauhati. It would have appeared almost unbelievable that Tirot's own mother, at the nick of time, should have resorted to such an action to save her son's most sworn enemy. Such an attitude would have been very inconsistent with the tradition which says that the mothers should be bound to bless their sons before going to war. The Nongkhlaw queens were themselves ardent patriots. Therefore little reliance could be placed on this story. It is also mentioned that Scott on the night prior to the incident fled to Sohra for shelter. The tradition says that at Mawphlang, he received considerable assistance from its Lyhgдох who escorted him to Sohra passing through Sohrarim, Mr. Scott was asked to go in disguise as a labourer to escape suspicion from the people who were subjects of Tirot Singh. At Sohra Scott was sheltered by Duwan. It is said that a group of Nongkhlaw warriors intercepted Scott's escape to Sohra and gave him a chase, but at Sohra they failed to intercept since Scott was hidden by Rajah Duwan Singh. It was on April 7, that he received the news of the massacre of the two Lieutenants and sepoy at Nongkhlaw.

Mr. Scott sent message immediately when rescued, from Sohra to Sylhet when this news was received, the troops of the Sylhet Light Infantry were immediately ordered to rescue him and reinstate British force in the hills. In the meantime, the advance of troops from Gauhati was obstructed. Captain F.G. Lister from Sylhet covered up the march rapidly.

In this connection, another record gives a similar version to that narrated by the tradition which says that Mr. Scott had been briefing in the hills to affect an operation against Bor Manik, not Tirot Singh, who had taken steps to organise an opposition against the British advances. He had proceeded to Sohra to have negotiations with Duwan when the news of the Nongkhlaw massacre came. It is also said that, on his way to Sohra, he was invited by certain persons from Rambrai before departing

for Sohra, but Scott smelling a conspiracy hatched upon his life carefully avoided and thus came to Sohiong where he received shelter. From there probably he proceeded to Sohra under perhaps his friend's escort.

It is said that David Scott's escape which came unexpectedly had been of great concern to Tirot Singh, the latter being compelled to put maximum measures to strengthen this alliance.

In the meantime, Tirot Singh, Bor Manik and Muken were seeking to strengthen the defence against attacks both from Assam and Sylhet side. The timely escape of Scott and his shelter by U Duwan had really impeded their progress since they did not succeed to avoid the real opponent in this contest. Tirot was aware of the British Plan, he knew that a clever Englishman would now send several punitive measures to subjugate this movement. He understood it well that David Scott was a British lion not to be easily done away with. Deprive the British government of Scott, then the liberation task would have been easier. He had already gathered a vast experience in the Hills affairs and could, therefore, handle the situation more effectively. Tirot could not but impress also with Scott's bold action in making new arrangements at the cost of the weak neighbours. In the meantime, Durbars were held to offer suitable resistance to the British advance.

On the other hand, Scott knew that the Khasis had been prepared to fight with the East India Company. He knew that Tirot Singh had organised a confederacy to obtain his kinsmen's support. He himself had obtained considerable help from intelligence operators of Rajah Duwan Singh, his valuable ally, about such developments. He was now planning to adopt such measures to break off his alliance with the use of both coercion and diplomacy.

Thus the Anglo-Khasi Treaty of friendship was broken inspite of the amicable relations which started immediately after the conclusion of the said treaty. The wars that followed showed that all was not well with the treaty. In fact the treaty was considered as humiliating to the people and it brought misfortune upon



them. The Khasi league of princes had been incited with fresh songs of patriotism, to do or die in their struggle for recovering the country's freedom from the alien domination.

Mr. Scott was greatly relieved by Captain Lister's arrival with a strong contingent of the Sylhet Light Infantry. During a climb to Cherra, Lister of course had to fight with the southern Khasis. Meanwhile the news of the insurrection also had reached the other parts of Assam. The British and their allies thought first to effect the arrest of Tirot, their first target. Having got him first, their task would have been easier to catch red-handed others who had engineered such a challenge to their mighty empire. Muken and U Bor Manik were also their enemy No. 1 not to speak of the other ranks and files of the fifth columnist. They thought of several tricks, to trap the independent highlanders whereas the Khasis too planned different means of strategem to keep the Englishmen more engaged in the plains.

Duwan besides granting asylum to David Scott, rendered all possible help to the British to conduct operation. The movement flared up throughout the length and breadth of the country. Tirot and Muken had now pledged to strengthen the defence and hold fast Laitkynsew and Mawmluh the Nongkhlaw's principalities in the vicinity of Sohra against the attacks with a view to pressurising the section of timid people then friendly to the government and finally to expel the whitemen from their soil.

On the Assam side, on hearing the message, Capt. White, Principal Assistant, Gauhati, set off for the hills, accompanied by Lieutenant Vetch. At Jirang, they faced a party commanded by Tirot Singh's relative but since they failed to reduce them, Vetch ordered a retreat to the plains, to recruit more men before making a second advance into the hills. He sacked a neighbouring village and burnt it to the ground. "The village being situated on a rocky eminence surrounded by a jungle in which the enemy had taken refuge, to secure our position, it became necessary to set fire to houses skirting but being filled, it extended to the whole village, and soon presented a scene strangely contrasted-looking upwards, a lofty pillar of fire rose from the deserted village, and

beyond it dense column smoke towered up to the highest heaven, presenting an object of great sublimity—a strange Bachchnalian scene. Beneath a strange Bachchnalian scene of licence arose upon the view—some of the soldiers and camp followers were shooting pigs and fowls, others were roasting them before the fire—some were searching for a plunder and running about in the gay dress of the cossyas—a few were eagerly searching for their arms to carry as trophies, whilst other joyous souls made free with their spirituous liquors—they will made admirable cheers for the evening, and the free spirit of the camp reigned throughout.” The British attack from Assam was kept pending for a time being. This is what the *Memoir of David Scott* tells us.

Mawmluh's defence was maintained by Tirot and his uncle Khyllup vicegerent of Mawmluh-Laitkynsew. This initial British success was to be ascribed to the active help of “Duwan Syiem who had provided them men to reconnoitre and also a large body of warriors to assist the Government troops.” This is what Hooker in *Himalayan Journal* says that at Mawmluh, several warriors were forced down the ridge and shot to death. It was on this occasion that Tirot during an engagement narrowly escaped.

The gods were on Tirot's side in making good his escape. Now having failed to hold these principalities, Tirot Singh suggested that his allies should have respective spheres of jurisdiction to cope with the invasion in which Bor Manik was destined to undertake defence from the north leaving the defence of the southern region to Tirot and Muken. The messengers with great speed had reached the principal Syiems and Wahdadar on the north, west and south; large masses of people had come to join Tirot Singh and the war drums echoed everywhere. The war was to drag on and shall produce its effect in the days to come.



## Tirot Singh and his Confederates

THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT at the outset had not calculated that such an alliance was being projected by the Syiems. The supreme authority from Fort William, on receiving the news, had issued instructions to the local authority to adopt suitable measures to subdue the Khasis. David Scott, in token of gratitude for the help he had received from other rulers, was conceiving a scheme to compensate his allies suitably. At the outset, the government thought that it would not take long to quell the movement. Meanwhile Tirot Singh had obtained considerable support from his countrymen. His position was strengthened by the active cooperation rendered by other contemporary kings. It is necessary to dwell on other events and war in which Tirot was instrumental.

Laitkynsew and Mawmluh subdued, Lister and Scott now embarked on a well co-ordinated campaign to follow up the insurrectionists to the other places. The government too had won a few allies amongst whom were U Sing Manik of Khyrim and U Syiem-Iong or U Kala Rajah of Nongspung. Both the tradition and record indicate that Sing Manik, Deputy Syiem of Shillong, at the height of the war, adopted a neutral attitude; this occurred during the time when Bor Manik was heavily engaged in offering battles to the British from Bortula and Desh Dimurua to Myllem and Shillong in the hills and Umngot river on the south. Thus in these circumstances, Sing Manik later on was established at Khyrim whereas Myllem and the remainder of it was planned to be restored to Bor Manik's successor as would be

selected. In course of time, Nongstoin and Nongspung were also considered as neutral States. The record does not indicate that any treaty was concluded with any of the above States, Pro-British or neutral which were graded as *Independent States*. We have mentioned how Duwan Singh on the other hand, exerted pressure to assist the government from the very outset. Sing Manik, however, finally played the role of a pacifist and his diplomatic measures enabled the Government to come to terms with U Tirot Singh which led to the conclusion of the war. Such changes had helped Mr. Scott to be placed more favourably.

By the last week of April 1829, the Britishers followed up their success rapidly. Scott had advanced to Shillong whereas Lister had already approached Nongkhlaw, occupying the villages of Nongbri, Mairang and finally Nongkhlaw. Everywhere the soldiers set the villages to fire, the Khasis put a stout defence at the cost of great sacrifices, death and loss of property. An intensive economic blockage was also imposed.

With the fall of Nongkhlaw, Tirot Singh was declared an outlaw and a reward of Rs. 1,000 was announced for his apprehension. Mr. Scott being authorised to inflict 'condign punishment upon Tirot Singh on its being proved that the massacre perpetrated by his machinations had been unprovoked by any act of violence'.<sup>1</sup> The government approved Mr. Scott's plan to award suitably the government's allies. An amnesty was declared also to those who preferred to submit. Mr. Scott had announced that in spite of reverses affected by the war, the government would be content to observe in letter and spirit the treaty of 1826 which should provide an asset for guidance of future relations. This, however, could not be accepted by the Khasis since in their heart of hearts they were seeking to get back their independence. Tirot had now desired that the road was either to be abandoned or diverted to other places. This was the core of the problem besides which the kings wanted to have the Dwars added to their dominions.

Among Tirot's best men, mention is made of U Khein Kongor

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. of letters received from Govt., 1829 6A, pp. 244-251.



and Lorshon Jarain. The former besides commanding in the field, was concerned in affecting shelter to the royal family, whereas U Lorshon distinguished himself in both executing effective strategy and providing supplies from Assam. The most stalwart figure, however, was Mon Bhut. He was distinguished in all acts of warfare, in making daring assaults and in rapid movements. Mon Bhut's background is, however, controversial. One source to quote says : 'Born in the ignoble condition of a slave to the Rajah Teeruth Singh, he has risen by his undaunted spirit to the chief command. Foremost in every fight, although others discomfited, and once severely wounded, he has ever breathed the same spirit of defiance, and has proudly expressed his determination never to submit to the British government with his dying breath. However cruel and perfidious the conduct of the Cossyas may have been, and however erraneous the impression he may labour under, yet, respect the patriotic feeling which has animated his conduct.

The active leader put up four or five of our small detachments; he generally succeeded by planting his men in ambush, either in long grass, or behind rocks, who springing up, or darting out upon our men, cut them down before they had time to fire. On one occasion, whilst unarmed and busily employed marketing in the bazar; his sudden appearance of course produced an instantaneous rout, and his men, with great difficulties, escaped to their stockade; he cut down one and wounded many others. In May 1830, Lieutenant H. Vetch having received correct information as to his haunt, surrounded the house at night, with a party. Mon Bhut, seeing himself beset, broke down one side of the house with the intention of escaping; but his egress was barred in this direction, by Lieutenant Vetch who had planted himself there with his fowling piece. Sending an arrow through that officer's cap, Mon Bhut made almost desperate push for the door, and, laying about with his sword, broke, in the darkness, through the party, and escaped'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Memoir of David Scott.



Another source says that he was originally a blacksmith from a village in the north and was most concerned in the murder of Lieutenants Burlton and Beddingfield. But in the operations of Tirot Singh on the occasion, his village was burned down. He has been concerned in the various plundering excursions in the plains attended with bloodshed and murder but he was never been guilty of individuals who have fallen into their hands . . . . . Mon Bhut only puts the sepoys to death as he considers them as those who seek to destroy him.<sup>1</sup> However, it was true that Mon Bhut was another creation of Tirot.

Mon Bhut's exploits, were told from time to time and until now his deeds still echo in the hearths and huts. In 1830 at another instance, news came to Lieutenant Vetch about Mon Bhut's briefing at a nearby village in June 1830, when the Lieutenant, accompanied by a party of his own corps and a few musketeers, proceeded to that village and succeeded in surprising Mon Bhut in the morning of June 19, but owing to the size of the village and the want of a sufficient number of men to surround all the houses, the chief and most of his people escaped, leaving seven dead and wounded twenty of the Assam Local Corps.<sup>2</sup>

For sometime U Mon Bhut because of his feats which bewildered the British officers overshadowed U Tirot from the scene. But he drew, inspiration for these accomplishment from his master that was Tirot Singh.

Most of the warriors were of great physical strength. We find of U Mor, Lyngdoh of Nongkrem of great physical process who carried single-handed gigantic stone pillars and heavy tree posts for a great distance. When travelling, he carried a gun, picking it up on his mouth while swimming across rivers during his journey. It is said that he considerably assisted Bor Manik in the defence of Laitkroh, Myllem, Nongkrem and other places. The Khasis

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<sup>1</sup>For 1831. Dept. Pol. Con-II Feb No. 26-32.

<sup>2</sup>For 1830 Dept. Pol. Con. 18 June No. 52.



used a bow arrows, a double handed sword, a spear and a shield but a few veterans used artilleries of indigenous manufacture.

The British initial success was a great blow to the Khasis. On the other hand Tirot was drawing considerable support from his countrymen. A confederacy thus, came into being after several Syiems and rulers pledged support to him. This alliance sustained him until the collapse of the movement which lasted for four years.

Most of the Syiems, after the Burmese war drew to its close, were concerned with the fate of their kingdoms located at the plains, they saw to the several measures to exclude them from their respective markets, they saw too to the encroachments upon the boundary and the seizure of the important principalities. These circumstances helped them to unite and offer stiff resistance to recover their sovereign status they had hitherto enjoyed since time immemorial. They saw that the continued British penetration would, in the long run, be disastrous to their political, social and economic systems and would deprive them of their economic independence. They cherished great fears in these and other issues. It is true that the British advancement would have its adverse effect into the vitality of community life, traditional and village system of education, sitting of Durbars and many other pristine traditions. They saw to the adverse effect upon the status and position of women. Such were their views and this was the reason why the Nongkhlaw confederates sought to cling tenaciously to Tirot Singh for a long time.

Tirot Singh although resented at the British successes, was still drawing inspiration from his compatriots where most of them were prone to do and die to recover the freedom of their land. The confederacy provided men of different taste, temperament and skills. The closest associate of Tirot was Jidor, who was skilled in planning and executing strategies for a counter attack; Bor Manik was another skillfull organiser who had exerted pressure to obtain support from his countrymen and other kingdoms. The tradition says that he succeeded in making nego-

tiations with far-flung countries such as Burma, Bhutan, Tibet and Arunachal. Mon Bhut made wonderful exploits and confounded the authorities everywhere. Muken from time to time succeeded in affecting reverses into the British arrangement in the south. Drawing inspiration from them, the other western Syiems followed suit and offered recalcitrant attitude for a long time. Most of them fitted well with Tirot's plans for counter-attacks.

Bor Manik was an illustrious leader. He spent some of his time outside the hills in search of an alliance from other parties. A veteran in guerrilla warfare, he did not require too many hands to assist in conducting the campaigns but he always fought single-handed by using several means of strategem. Like Mon Bhut, he succeeded, many a time, in confounding the military authorities. It is said that the top-most officers were often bewildered in intercepting him. From Nongkrem and Myllem, the scenes of battles, shifted to Laitlyngkot and Laitkroh and along the precipitous heights, he fought in the arduous battles against the Britishers. Once a group of the Sepoys, dressed in disguise as natives, approached Bor Manik's men lying in wait near a cliff. The latter had already received advance intelligence, and having seen them reaching nearer to their position, hurled at them with stones, chiselled from the boulders, and shot with their arrows, till they were destroyed completely.

Jidor mainly acted as a liaison between Tirot and Bor Manik in which Durbars were held, with a great number of men present, where they discussed plans for a counter offensive. At times, Bor Manik was known to have trained warriors at Nongkseh, near Shillong town, being the well known Shillong Syiem's military arsenal. At Kynton Iewduh, on the top of Shillong Town's bazar, an interview was arranged with the Assamese envoys namely Moniram Dewan and Pholige Phukan. The envoys came up from so far to despatch intelligence, and at the same time, to strengthen the alliance. Like Mon Bhut, Bor Manik, was known for his rapid movements, his handling



of strategies and his effective operations. He was of great physical vigour and carried a heavy bow made of brass. He was so swift in moving about that in the morning hours, he was found engaged at Panduah; at day-time, he had traversed a great distance through the hills and in the evening hours he was found engaged in defence of the Desh Beltola and Sonapur located in modern Kamrup.

Let us now examine the progress of British advancements.

Lister was more relieved by arrivals of the fresh reinforcements from Assam. Since Vetch's retreat from Jirang, many important events had occurred. In fact, the great part of Assam was moved and taking advantage of the situation, many insurrections in the plains were planned with the view to upset the British administration. During those days, Vetch had not received definite news about Mr. Scott's fate as the rumours had already spread that Scott had perished in the battle at Nongkhlaw. The situation changed when about a week after, the joyful intelligence of Mr. Scott's escape was received, and that the Sylhet force was in motion. With more reinforcements received, Vetch embarked on a second excursion to Nongkhlaw, accompanied by Captain Urquhart's detachment. Reaching Nongkhlaw, Vetch was reunited with Scott. Scott and Vetch were now concerned in clearing up the lines of roads to Gauhati from barricades and panjies laid by the Khasis. Upon Vetch, devolved the task to open communication with Gauhati via Jirang whereas Urquhart was directed to return to Assam by making a detour by Rambrai. This former line was heavily blocked up. The memoir of David Scott says : "We encountered little resistance from the enemy, who invariably retreated on being fired upon; but the natural and artificial obstacles opposed to our progress was, such, that had the Cossyas evinced a proper spirit, the detachment must inevitably have been lost. The country between Nunkhlow and Assam is extremely difficult of access, being a succession of steep acclivities and declivities, covered with the densest jungle, and affording position capable of being defended by a few determined men against an army. On



the present occasion, the roads were planted with sharp bamboo stakes, called *Panjhies*, and the most difficult passes were obstructed with trees and stockaded—most fortunately Mr. Scott had carried a body prisoners from jail to act as pioneers, and, by their aid, he was enabled to extricate the detachment from the dilemma in which it was placed.”

The detachment under Captain Urquhart and Lieutenant Dewas affected on “its detour without any loss from the enemy, but the sickness which prevailed in his detachment on its return, affords a striking exemplification of the noxious climate of these jungles in the hot season; of 80 sepoy's there were not more than two or three who did not go into the hospital, and the two European officers suffered severely from sickness.” Tirot Singh's confederates appear to have not stationed suitable reinforcements in these lines to launch an offensive upon the troops. This was a clear indication of a poor intelligence displayed by Tirot Singh's advisers which led to strengthening of British position at Nongkhlaw. Mr. Scott was present in most of the skirmishes taking place. ‘At one time he was out on a horse back with a few of followers, and, perceiving a body of Cossyas manoeuvred ably; and kept them in a play, whilst he despatched a messenger to Captain Lister; who, making a detour unseen, came unexpectedly upon the Cossya leaders, in a grand debate whether they should push on in that quarter or not. A volley of musquetry broke up the council, and the leaders, retired in great confusion—the Rajah Tirot Singh being wounded and a number left dead’.. This was second occasion that Tirot although wounded was still safe. Fate till then was still with Rajah U Tirot.

Liberation movement thus was revitalised from time to time, Jibor, Syiem of Rambrai, having noted Urquhart's penetration into the Kingdom now took side with Tirot Singh. Jibor had already sheltered many insurrectionaries who had escaped. U Lar of Myriaw also followed; both Syiems resented British ascendancy of Kamrup and had already greatly suffered owing to the new arrangement made by the government. South-



wardly, Sohbar, Shella, Mawlong had already taken recalcitrant attitude against the Company. Yet in spite of these reverses daily help was reaching Tirot Singh from elsewhere. A large number of volunteers came from the several parts of the country. An active intelligence service was instituted. Many persons from even Sohra, Khyrim and the neutral States came to join Tirot Singh.

As regards Wahlong, a belligerent village, it is understood that it was once included under Khyrim under the charge of a royal agent stationed at Panduah. However, during the advent of the Company, it was placed under the Sohra Syiem's jurisdiction. Prior to 1829 Wahlong, Sohkhylum and Mawthang were looked after by Luk Syiem, Bykut, Daloi and Jubur Daloi respectively who were all subsidiary to Sohra. Luk Syiem offered resistance which led to the invasion of Wahlong by David Scott and Duwan Singh Rajah on which occasion, U Luk Syiem was killed by Duwan and his head was brought to David Scott. U Somer Giri, son of Duwan, was placed temporarily in charge of Wahlong, Sohbar and Byrung. On 6th January 1876, U Hajon Manik Syiem of Sohra, appealed to the government that Wahlong, dissevered from Sohra, ought to have been restored to his kingdom and should not be treated as a State Sirdarship because it originally belonged to Sohra and because Duwan Singh had made such contribution to subdue it.<sup>1</sup> The Rajah Hajon Manik was wondering these changes that had occurred which deprived his State of the due recognition that she should have as the government's faithful ally. But the government had wrongly deprived Sohra of a territory which legitimately belonged to her.

The difficulties faced by the Khasis were also many. They were hard pressed by the continued British operations, skirmishes taking place daily. Most of the villages were tiny inhabitations with small, limited resources which remained victims to rigorous military operation. The British with the strength of

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<sup>1</sup>Report of Land Reforms Commission for Khasi Hills, pp. 204-205.

their arms successfully tackled these uprisings. Villages were reduced to near extinction after being completely burnt. Unprotected women could hardly bear the brunt of such suffering. Many families were compelled to vacate their dwellings and hide in the jungles and caves. In the meantime, the capitulation of many southern villages was obtained. During the autumn and winter seasons, chief leaders from the south came to terms with the British Government.



## Syiems who Came to Tender Allegiance (1829)

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, inspite of U Tirot Singh's persistence could not help respecting him as a great patriot dedicated to the cause of his land. Therefore in dealing with kingdoms which entered protection, David Scott took steps that their status as Khasi States was retained. Such relations were governed by the treaties enforced from time to time. The states were compelled to accept British protection and stop having connection with other parties, opposed to the British Crown. Some states had to surrender some of their judicial powers and were compelled to cooperate with the East India Company in the scheme of a road construction. Most of the states had to pay an indemnity to meet the cost of the various British expeditions. One important provision was related to the taking lease of the limestones and minerals by the East India Company or by any agency who acted on their behalf, the witty mind of David Scott of course conceiving the utilisation of power for running such industries and obtaining good revenue for England which had established a great empire spread over all the continents, the government having played a paramount role also in giving this vast Sub-continent of India an image of unity, integration and constitutionalism. However the East India Company from inception made repeated efforts to inspect the Khasi states. Tirot Singh demonstrating great courage was responsible mostly for soliciting this respect from the Government.

Tirot Singh knew that these circumstances would continue. He knew that the wars would leave their impact on the contemporary history. He knew that the people would have to sacrifice a lot. He had heard about treaties being imposed upon the other kings if no remedy was given and the circumstances might lead to a full subjugation of this land. He was seeking to prevent the merger of states into actual British province which came to occur in the case of his neighbours. It was his far sightedness, his gallantry and chivalry which have enabled the present Khasi states in the present Constitution of India. And yet with the hopes that he cherished, Tirot was resenting the destruction, ravage and havoc which came along with the wars shifting themselves from one scene to another in this land. Yet with Muken, Bor Manik and the other patriotic Kings, he was determined to continue this struggle and create an effective strategy to keep away the British rulers. More than an insurrection in arms, it was also a diplomatic exertion of both sides to win their respective cause.

Now we come to the stories of the treaties.

Shella was the first state to execute a treaty on September 3, 1829 in which the four Wahdadars namely U Bir, U Mishmi, U Ksan and U Sumer, agreed to pay a fine of Rs. 4,000 and granted to government the right to use the limestone quarries located on the Bokra river bank. The other terms were prescribed that the state should accommodate no more such fugitive rebels escaping from other places and permit government to investigate in quarrels between Shella and the other parties.

Then came U Lar of Myriaw to execute a treaty on October 12, 1829 by which he agreed to govern the state in consonance with the customary laws; the treaty entitled him to settle judicial cases except murder cases which should be handed over to government.

The next confederate who tendered allegiance to the government was U Jibor of Rambrai who concluded the treaty on October 17, 1829 which provisions were similar to those which Myriaw accepted, but besides them, the Syiem agreed to



pay an indemnity whatever as should be decide, and further that his kingdom should subscribe military assistance in the event, the Government would requisition from him such assistance.

Yet upon this state further terms were meted out which brought about the confiscation of three territories of the state located in Kamrup plains by the name of Pantan, Bogayee and Bongaong. Scott wrote, 'the estates in question..... were under detachment; the first in consequence of the part which the Rajah had taken against us in the hills, and the two latter, for the recovery of arrears of revenue.' Thus Jibor was obliged to comply with these conditions. The loss registered from the Dwars was immense as the state derived a good deal of revenue from the ryots. Later on a movement was launched toward the recovery of these Dwars in 1830-31.

Inspite of the adverse circumstances as amended, Tirot Singh was still able to obtain good support from the other confederates; in fact, Muken, Phar of Bhowal, Ador of Maw-iyram, Ram Singh of Maharam and others fought to their last until 1832. U Tirot on the other hand was one of the last Syiems to be captured either in a straight contest or otherwise.

Having quelled Shella, the government took other measures to reduce other southern states including Sohbar and Dwara Nongtyrnem. These chiefs had cultivated relations with the Company's authorities at Sylhet; they were taking advantage to make up some of the losses they sustained earlier. However being inconsiderable villages, they could hardly sustain with the result that Sohbar along with allied villages of Munrong and Musphoon Poonjee had to accept a treaty on October 27, 1829 at Mawsmal in which in lieu of fines, the delegation agreed to surrender "to the Sirdar half of all our limestone quarries, good, bad or indifferent". So also Byrung, Omthelee and Comorah submitted and in the treaty excuted, on November 2, 1829, they agreed to have their villages burned, in the event they were found harbouring the hostile persons.

One of the most decisive events, however, was Bor Manik's

fall. In a letter dated October 14, 1835 addressed to Captain F. G. Lister, Political Agent, Shan Manik wrote that it was for the loss of the Assam Dwars that Bor Manik resented and hence he had decided to fight the British government. To quote an extract from his letter to F. G. Lister :

“About a year after the British authorities were in possession, an Aumeen was sent to measure the Des, when the Revenue was settled by Mr. Scott and a man named Mahador Burrowa, an Assamese, put in charge by him. On hearing this, my uncle, Bor Manik my immediate predecessor, who but from old age has resigned in my favour, sent four of his Cossya Muntries (Ministers) to Mr. Scott to assert his claim to the place. Immediately his Muntries arrived at Gowahutty, some Assamese (his enemies) told that gentleman that they had come with hostile intentions; then Mr. Scott without enquiry into the truth of this information, put the Muntries into irons and confined them. The treatment the Muntries so unjustly received deterred him from going to Mr. Scott personally.

About six or seven years ago, when Mr. Scott was on his route from Nongkhlaw to Cherra, he sent Burjoorain and Nor Singh, two interpreters, to my uncle who said that Mr. Scott had promised that if he went and had an interview with him, the desh would be restored to him. He was ready to go, but the former treatment of his Muntries, having exasperated his subjects, and they, having no reliance on this promise, they prohibited his going and told him, if he attempted to do so contrary to their wishes, that they would cut him down, on which account he did not go. Three or four days after this, the massacre at Nungkhaw took place and the Poonjee of Moleem having been taken by the troops under your command, he fled with his family.

Sometime after this a Jemadar of Sepahees presented a Purwana to my uncle purporting to be from Mr. Scott, *Des Döomreya* and his Hill Possession should be restored to him. In good faith of this promise he agreed to accompany the Jamadar who immediately seized and sent him to Mr. Scott at



Nungkhlow, by whom he was confined to irons and a demand of Rs. 3,300 as a fine and two of my cousins to remain with him as hostages made. For fear of life and to obtain his liberty, he agreed to these conditions and gave a written agreement for the former and delivered our Councins Oo Ksan and Oo Joy to Mr. Scott as Hostages, on which he was released. The Hostages always were present with Mr. Scott and Oo Joy died whilst with him in Assam."<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that Bor Manik's capture was not affected on a straight contest. It was done by devious means. Bor Manik for so long, had fought bravely at several places and had won the distinction of being an ardent patriot and good fighter. Another record says : Bor Manik, whose country of Moleem was occupied for some time in the year 1829 by our troops in consequence of his having taken arms against us... was a distant relative of the late Singh Manick Rajah, and styled himself Rajah of Khyrim... He was obliged to flee from the country in consequence of some disagreement with the British government during the late rebellion of the Khasis leaving it in charge of U Singh Manick Rajah, who contrived to keep possession of it by remaining neutral in those troubled times.<sup>2</sup> Tradition has it that Bor Manik managed to return and assisted Tirot Singh during the last years of the struggle.

In the circumstances described above, Bor Manik was compelled to resign to his fate and accept a treaty with the government executed on January 15, 1830. By this treaty, he agreed to deliver to government plots of land located south east of river Omiyong (Umiam) in which his jurisdiction over this place thus came to lapse. He agreed to administer his country in conformity with the customary laws and usages and assist government with military assistance and other kinds of help. All cases of capital punishment were to be dealt with by the

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<sup>1</sup>Political proceeding 24th and 25th July 1836 Vol. 854 No. 88 CD from Chand Manick, Rajah of Moleem to Captain F. G. Lister, Political Agent Cosseash Hills.

<sup>2</sup>File No. 306 13.9 Genl. Dept. No. 202/1.12.1859.

Agent to Governor General. Article V provided that Desh Dimurua was ceded to the government in lieu of a plot of land near Sonapur hat and he agreed further to pay Rs. 5,000 to government. The treaty recognised him as King of Assam Chilong. Irrespective of the terms he had accepted to fulfil, Bor Manik was still, later on, at large with Tirot Singh and rendered him invaluable assistance until the collapse of the movement.

British position was still strengthened by Duwan's acceptance of another treaty signed on September 10, 1829 in which a plot of land lying at Saitsohpen in a lower spur below Sohra, was ceded to government in exchange for Panduah in Sylhet besides which, other conditions were stipulated to extend government protection over the state whereas the latter was bound to render whatever possible assistance to the Sircar when so requisitioned. The government reserved the right to acquire a portion of limestone quarries from the state. The government also reserved the right to arbitrate disputes arising thus disputes amongst the Khasis, were to be dealt with by the Rajah himself, quarrels if occurred among the two communities were to be referred to a joint court. This treaty, therefore, considerably assisted to strengthen the British base in the hills which thus became converted into the first District headquarters and which remained so until when it was transferred to Shillong in 1863-1864.



## Diplomatic Reaction

THE ENGLISH OFFICERS adopted various diplomatic means to deal with the insurgency in which they received full cooperation from U Duwan and Iong or Bolaram. But the conduct of Ram Singh of Jaintia was doubtful since Pamberton in his book *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India* notes thus : 'In the treaty formed with the Rajah, he formally acknowledges his dependence on the East India Company, pledged himself to abstain from all independent negotiations with any foreign power, and to aid with a military contingent in any wars waged east of the Burhampooter. None of these conditions, however, he did fulfil with security, and it was notorious that, during the war, he permitted a Burmese detachment from Assam to occupy his territory, in direct violation of the treaty which preserved his country from the calamities that overwhelmed the less fortunate State of Cachar and Muneepoor !' From the beginning relations with the East India Company were far from happy and were the antecedents that led to the outbreak of the Jaintia freedom movement in 1860-61 championed by U Kiang Nongbah, another illustrious patriot.

David Scott, on account of the wars which had dragged on could not settle these complicated affairs. The Governor-General Vis-a-Vis President-in-Council in June 1829, who issued instructions to deal with the so-called rebels firmly wanted Mr. Scott to take up further expansion schemes and explore transport facilities. He affirmed Mr. Scott's views that their allies should be respected while U Tirot Singh and other outlaws



be punished. However, Scott realised later on that Tirot Singh was not wholly responsible being for the struggle launched, he backed up by Kings and ministers to start that movement.

It was not roses, roses all the way. On June 4, 1830, Scott communicated to Mr. Swinton, Secretary to the Government of India thus, "I regret to state that no considerable progress has been provided in conciliating and reducing the Nungkhlaw Cossyachs to a quiet submission". Bor Manik's capture was the result of Mr. Scott's well contrived plan, he forced it during an interview which was exploited so assiduously. For Scott knew that there was no other way to overthrow Bor Manik. Had Bor Manik wisely avoided the interview, the war would have dragged on longer not to terminate in 1833. Scott possibly managed to exploit the situation just at the ripe time when Bor Manik was nearly successful in building up a stable alliance against the British might. He was engaged to make up that loss by getting other helpers. However Bor Manik was attached to Tirot until almost the end of the movement.

But he was determined to carry it out for, the alliance he had built up was now extended to the Garos. In April-May 1829, he acted upon such incentives : 'Having selected the most intelligent prisoners among those released at Nungkhlaw, he had sent them off with letters to Chandra Kunt, the Bhots the Singphos.... exciting them to throw off the Yoke of the English'. An extract from the letter addressed to the Ahom ex-Rajah reads as follows : "The country of the Rajah have taken possession of by the English. We have been greatly annoyed. We have now killed the English gentlemen here. Should the Rajah now rise and assist us we can with the Garrow people descend (from) the hills". There were several secret exchanges of envoys with the Assamese, his nearest neighbours and the far-flung tribes such as the Singpho, the Khampti, the Bhutia, the Tibetan. Tirot conceived the paramount need to divert the war throughout the length and breadth of North-Eastern India, so as to weaken the British position effectively and ultimately to restore the ancient freedom. Tirot deputed Bor



Manik to make such contacts. The English men of course were bewildered to intercept the brisk movement of Bor Manik who sought to keep contacts near and far. Bor Manik made Gauhati his headquarters centre where he kept on contacts with the Northern Khasi Rajahs and other non-Khasi Chieftains. The government however, obtained clues to this conspiracy later on. They coordinated several measures by military operations to isolate the Singphos and played their divide and rule (tactic) to keep the Khamptis away from the Singphos. The Singphos however made their common cause with the Burmese for a long time. The name of U Tirot Singh spread far and wide and this region acknowledged his leadership in the liberation of North-East India. He was in fact the first and foremost among the other heroes of North-East.

In Assam both Purandar and Rajah Chandra Kanta were rivals among themselves, during the early part of the Burmese invasion. With the British advance, both were deprived of power. It is said that Tirot Singh's messengers, were intercepted during their journey to Kuliabar to hand over letters to the Rajah, Chandra Kanta and Purandar. The government suspected Chandra Kanta's actual involvement in the conspiracy and obtained his transfer soon to Gauhati. Purandar was also transferred to another place.

In February, 1830, occurred a skirmish between a contingent of the Assam Light Infantry with the Singpho leader, Latora Gam in which, some Khamptis assisted him. The Singphos had planned a widespread attack in Upper Assam in which several messages were borne to Tirot Singh. The Company's officials, thereupon, were directed to deal with the situation firmly and check Tirot Singh's liaison with Duffa Gam and the war-like Singphos. The Eastern tribes had also wished to throw off the Yoke of a foreign regime and the Khamptis had desired to transfer their allegiance to Burmese and thus in their efforts to overthrow the British, L. Gogoi admitted in his book *Tai Khampti*, that Khamptis had secured support from the Western tribes, viz., the Garo and the Khasi.



Tirot's system of alliance was commendable; under combined operation, he hoped to restore the Kings to their previous positions as full sovereigns within their own spheres. But he also saw to the common danger that lurked and urged upon his allies to rise as one man. So he persisted on. The move of the government to subdue his confederates only roused his spirit higher. He avoided to demonstrate dictatorial whims and sought to get all his policies expedited in a democratic way through the consent of the Durbar, both open and confidential held for that purpose.

Tirot so far had stayed aloof and refused to be invited to negotiations with David Scott. Probably the lesson from Bor Manik's experience had created such an impression. But as advised by several Durbars, he acted consistently although he would have thought that face-to-face dialogues with David Scott could be helpful. Thus, he stayed back and continued his operations. Mr. Scott's diplomacy in certain areas indeed paid well the dividend. But in dealing with Rambrai it was not a full success after Jibor who had accepted the Treaty in 1829 was murdered by U Lorshon (Lalchand) his brother, who grasped power with the object to renew operation to overthrow the British power both in the hills and plains. The movement was revitalised.

Scott adopted different lines of diplomatic strategem in dealing with the Rajahs. He adopted a plan known as 'retributive justice' by which the villages subdued were meted out penalty they deserved. Thus, during the first phase of the struggle, recorded till April, 1830, a vast tract stretching up to the Assam Valley which included the whole of Myllem, the adjoining areas of Nongkhlaw, Rambrai and Myriaw was subdued. The conquered tract of course excluded a small pocket lying between Nongkhlaw and Myllem. The tract lying more westwardly of course had not been subdued completely. Scott conceived that the relations with the States so subdued should be on the basis of treaties which should seek to curtail their sovereign rights and enable the kings to carry out the administration of Justice for all but capital punishment where such cases could be adjudicat-



ed, was to be handled by the Agent to the Governor-General in the Panchayat to comprise the Rajahs as many times as necessary in a year. The venue of the Panchayat was proposed at Sylhet. Scott also resorted to imposing fines upon the recalcitrant parties which taxed immensely upon the State resources. A few war-like villages were treated as fully conquered and were classed as British Areas.

Tirot, rose to the situation admirably and exerted pressure to sustain himself. Later on, he found from experience that guerrilla warfare would have been more effectual in resisting his enemy. He changed his strategy by use of a guerrilla in place of conventional warfare because of the continued repression, he knew that his country, would soon be plunged into the political, economic and social servitude which would have disastrous results in all spheres of life.

He had received a good deal of help and was still lucky to have other gifted men, such as U Man Kumar Myntri, U Lorshai Mairang Sirdar and his own relative, U Jidor besides which, his allies such as U Muken, U Ram Singh (Maram), U Phar, U Ksan, U Lar continued, in spite of the odds to espouse to his cause. The tradition has it, that the communications with the Singphos, were repeatedly maintained, and it is said that Tirot Singh, personally visited that far-flung country by traversing a long distance through Assam, to plan a joint operation, while the East India Company was taking measures to keep him out. Tirot Singh was quick witted in making substitutes by gifted men. In certain cases, the loss of some other veterans was irreparable.

What was much regretted by Tirot Singh, was the betrayal of those kings who parted off company from the principles laid down by him and for which, he had lived and died to point out a moral. He made grievous remark on this state of affairs, having seen that a few of his close acquaintances, took an opposite side by siding with his enemy. Tirot Singh still held the ground. He lived in that state and was hearing daily news both of jubilation and resentment after he had left Nongkhlaw



and retired to a cave from where he conducted future operations.

But Tirot Singh even at his den was not deserted by both the relatives and friends. All the Pre-British and neutral kings never dared to hand him over even if they had the means to do so with the British assistance. Tirot Singh was still abided by influential persons among whom, Man Kumar was the most loved one and most trusted, one of his confidential advisers. Under these circumstances, his family life was distorted. Tirot having less chances to contact his own children. His command of respect, admiration and affection of his own country men was impressive. So none dared touch him. We know only Duwan and his successor U Suba Singh employed intelligence operations almost daily to find out the location of his war men. But it was beyond their own capacity and of their faithful persons to cause his capture.

He was still at large with his followers and the daily communications were kept. Visitors, envoys warriors and commanders flocked to him by devious paths. Money, foodstuff, provisions, weapons and new volunteers reached him daily. He had the sympathy of all in having suffered so much to the aggressiveness and highhandness of a foreign party. Fortunately, his own family backed him up solidly since Mr. Scott had not succeeded to create a division. Otherwise, the result would have been disastrous. The government regiment on several occasions sought to storm his arsenal at Diengiei but they were kept out while the guerrilla operations kept their troops busy elsewhere. The government could not help respecting this declared outlaw. Mr. Scott was at a loss to tackle with the prolonged insurgency.

It was because of the harassing warfare that David Scott in December, 1830 communicated thus: "I have taken upon myself to offer indemnity for the past to the outlaw chiefs upon their making their submission, but in consequence of distrust and some indifferences among themselves and owing to the dilatory manner in which these people conduct business, weeks



and months being consumed in long debates in which everybody is at liberty to take a part, nothing yet has been decided, although this advantage has been gained, that the outlaws are themselves now divided into two parties."

David Scott found that it was not easy to subjugate the tribesmen and the circumstances were not fitting in with the policy he had followed so that he had to avail more time to wait and see and coordinate both repressive and pacifist measures to close down this chapter.

Tirot Singh was hard hit by the rigorous measures adopted by the East India Company to reduce the villages to extinction in which several leaders were punished. Not to speak of the loss of valuable possession, many persons were starving. There was a loss too of traditions, art, village industries. The warriors used both guerrilla and terrorist method which brought about losses to the East India Company and which adversely affected their partners alike. So seeing to this wretched state, the hero in the strife now took to a last resort to forge a stronger league and he continued the battles.

Scott proposed that Rijon should be restored to Nongkhlaw who, during his minority, the elderly persons should conduct the administration. He also gave to the Kala Rajah of Nongspung a tract of land called Moteekhar along with five villages to be detached from Nongkhlaw. The Mawphlang and Sohiong Lyngdohs similarly received compensations in land. U. Sumar, son of Duwan, was reinstated at Wahlong, Sohbar and Byrung. The latter two tracts were incorporated in this state until the fifties when separate Sirdars were restored to them. Nongwah or Rani was also enjoying the confidence of the government. In other instances, the Khasi Dwars in Assam were bifurcated from the hold of the Syiems and made over to the government districts. To weaken the belligerent states, heavy economic blockade was imposed, several other villages saw, during the British penetration, and utter destruction. These and other measures had considerably taxed the small states. The Syiem of Mawiong also received some lands.

Scott's policy was successful in Shillong where the withdrawal of Bor Manik and the reinstating of U Sing Manik in the Khyrim portion of Shillong served his purpose well. Sing Manik was favourably placed and later on, won the confidence of both Tirot Singh and the Government of playing the role of an arbitrator during the last stage. U Bor Manik, on the other hand, who connived at with Tirot Singh rallied the available resources and strengthened the resistance until almost the close of the battles. The immediate effort of Scott's policy was the partitioning of Shillong into Myllem and Khyrim. But the precedent which led to this partition had subsisted since some time past dating back to the 17th Century.

The fines imposed upon defeated villages, was also effective in coercing the recalcitrant states. In spite of the treaties concluded, on the other hand, there was sufficient evidence of communications maintained with Tirot Singh's confederates and that many villages, still afforded protection and assistance to the pre-Tirot's parties. Such a state of affairs could not be checked. The cooperation that Scott had derived from pre-British factions had been of immense help in obtaining both military or diplomatic base of operation on the part of the British government. These shocking news daily were reaching Tirot Singh who took very seriously to this state of things and was considering ways and means with his compatriots to deal with the repressive and reactionary measures effectively. This led to a brief suspension of operations in 1830 to have time for strengthening the offensive lines.



## Question of Mastery

A NEW SCENE opens before us. The ascendancy of U Lorshon at Rambrai to a top position of a Leader had an important effect. He was equally determined never to yield to challenges, really an extra-ordinary figure. He believed more in the efficacy of wars and the infallibility of military alertness. To him the use of force was to be met by more force. Now this unique personage being added to Tirot Singh, there was to be a fresh resurgence under his inspired leadership. Not only he conducted the warfare with the other kings but he adopted tactics to pressurise his opponents. Thus like Mon Bhut he shaped the important action and played that role from 1830-31 to 1834.

But while Tirot Singh was influential in changing the course of events in Rambrai, he had not been successful enough to cause a transformation in the other states viz. Sohra and Shillong. Muken too had not gone far to evolve conditions in Sohra as should be helpful to their cause. This was the reason why Tirot could not continue the battles beyond 1833 which showed certain lapses in the policy.

Let us examine in some depth the adverse impact of the war upon both the peaceful and warring sections of the people. I wrote earlier that Nongkhlaw and her neighbourhood, was greatly changed, her charms and colours gone, fields were left uncultivated, houses became desolate and deserted, cattle and sheep were scattered, workshops and blacksmithies fell down and became emptied of their former tinkling notes and

abundant musical melodies. Property was put to ruin and devastation. The beautiful possessions of the people in their homes were destroyed by the sepoys.

Evil omens appeared on all sides of the horizon. A bad harvest resulting from the deterioration of cultivation was experienced. The economic blockade hit hard the inhabitants. The resources everywhere were being exhausted. The soldries were scattered everywhere to put out the blaze of the uprising.

These things only served to revive their hearts to more glowing achievements, so desperate, so energetic were all the sections of the people. The belligerent refused to comply with the demands of the Company being incited with fresh songs of patriotism, to do or die in this great freedom struggle. So the war drums howled out and the patriots declared they were afraid neither of bullet nor of starvation.

It was a Duwar who challenged Tirot and warned that with whatever strength he had rallied, he would not emerge successful yet in his plan to overthrow the Whiteman's regime (Kharlieh). He scorned, Tirot Singh for taking up arms against the whiteman who was to be invincible. He resented Tirot Singh for causing the havocs which affected his kingdom. He claimed to have consulted the omens which gave him a rational significance on the invincibility of an English man. Morendro Dunai in his book *Jingshai na la Ri* tells that Duwan Syiem saw a crow alighted on the branch of a tree one morning. On consulting the aged men, they gave him to understand that it was the prophecy bout the British creation which would come to stay and now would remove it. He foresaw that the resistance to their entry would start from the west. When the warriors earlier gave a chase to David Scott to his kingdom he told them 'I cannot deliver to any one else a man who got shelter in my kingdom'. Mr. Scott wanted to give him lands but he refused and wanted not more not less of his present existence whereas Mawphlang, Mawiang and others did take lands from him. But Duwan had his son reinstated on the south to deal firmly with the insurgent groups.



Mon Bhut's role became more demonstrated in 1830-31. He was like a giant, his physical constitution and prowess being beyond narration. His tactic was marvellous; he made miraculous attacks, big as a giant but he was bouyant as an eagle. Often he fell down from the mountain summits but rose up the next moment. He had numerous engagements in a day. Pamberton describes, that "he had risen by the force of innate courage and great personal prowess, the considerable distinction amongst his comrades, and though frequently defeated, as constantly renewed the contest in some sport far remote from the scene of his recent disaster; with inconceivable rapidity he traversed his native mountains in every direction, wherever there appeared a probability of inflicting injury on his personal foes; descending, even to the border villages in the plains, where his very name struck terror to the hearts of their timid inhabitants." The story further tells us that Muken Singh, exhausted during a long struggle in putting up their defence from the south, was almost inclined to submit, but it was for Mon Bhut's renewed sway, that he was obliged to continue. From a humble position, he had thus risen to a brilliant war commander, and was assigned an outstanding post of trust and responsibility at the moment when the country was leading to disastrous consequences. With Mon Bhut's taking of the field, Tirot Singh was much relieved when he utilised more of his time to make fresh contacts being favourably assisted by Man Kumar, Lorshai, Lorshon Jarain and Khein Kongor.

Since Nongkhlaw was subjugated in 1829, Tirot and his confederates shifted their base of operation to the Diengiei cave known till today as *Ka Krem Tirot* where it is said that the remains of his military arsenal are still to be seen. The cave was adjoined to the Nongkhlaw blacksmithies by a long tunnel, and through it constant transport and communications were maintained.

Having lost few conspicuous rulers from the south especially Shella and Sohbar to his system of alliance, Tirot now sought the help of the northern Syiems. Some of them had



been enrolled. But matters took a more definite turn when U Bor Manik and U Lorshon in person went as special envoys to Nongstoin, Jyrangam, Boko, Nonglang, and Mukay. Other teams flocked to the plains to enlist support from the Assamese. Messengers moved with lightning speed to Gauhati and other places to announce that the movement was to be revitalised. In this regards meetings were held at several places both in hills and plains and all accepted the decision in favour of prolonging assaults in the plain and strengthening their force in the hills. U Roo Rajah of Boko, U Long Rajah of Panbaree, U Simtoo Rajah of Mookay, U Jubbur Rajah of Mokut, Sheba Rajah of Rungshu and others came forward and joined him. This is the story how Tirot's second alliance was formed.

Several times they met at meetings to plan a new offensive in selected places at the plain to cause destruction to the newly established government. This time they would use terrorist methods and seize whatever articles of wealth they could get. They would concentrate operation not only in Assam but modern Bangladesh also. So they instituted other bases of operation to be located at Warding-Mawsynram side on the south and Jyrngam and Rambrai side on the north to renew operations in the plain. These kings remembered how much their states had flourished in those days before the British ad- methods and seize whatever articles of wealth they could get. They would concentrate operation not only in Assam but tants for the Khasi administrators were kind and considerate and were not bureaucratic or stringent as were the Zamindaris of Muslims in Bengal in dealing with the local inhabitants. They considered the ryots as their own children (*ki khum*) and enjoyed visiting them and with them conducted the Panchayats, courts and Durbars at their plain capital or interior place. They welcomed their children from the plain when they visited them on the hills and entertained them. They received them during the coronation, cremation and festival. The revenue from the hills was tight because of the democratic institution and the



kings maintained themselves comfortably with the revenue and provisions from the plain.

It was Tirot's master mind which conceived this plan. U Roo, U Long, U Jubbur Rajahs complained that the new arrangement was to be blamed because it brought about unnecessary interference. They felt themselves the legitimate ones to hold the Dwars and no one else. U Lorshon and U Sunta announced themselves to be willing to lead the proposed campaign to Bardwar and Pantan to liberate the people of the plain from a foreign yoke as they themselves described it. Tirot Singh said, "Lorshon we admire you for assuming this huge responsibility. I, however, might lack skill in taking up the proposed offensive so I will be commander of the second command. This time, I understand from our spies that most of the troops have been withdrawn from near Gauhati. It is the best time to strike at things. The countrymen in thousands are behind us. But the Syiem of Nongstoin all the time has been aloof. We must win him first, before we think to draw the Khyrim Syiem to us, who enjoys the Government patronage and holds the Dwar in Goalpara at this moment. This is why he has not joined us. We will negotiate and if need be, pressurise him to accept this alliance." Then Lorshon replied, "I am extremely busy in the plains. Someone else should do the job." Tirot Singh remarked, "I have discussed this with Bor-Manik. He is very willing, next week he will proceed to Nongstoin. We should attack Sylhet also. My brothers Nirod, Jidor and Mon Bhut also will lead the campaign. Whereas, I myself will be close to you. The Sirdar of Warding agreed to give us a base of operation. Next week we will send our arms and ammunitions and Mon Bhut will train 100 volunteers in this task. It is clear that Nongstoin changed side and joined U Simtoo Syiem, another illustrious warrior king.

Time was ripe and so, Tirot Singh and the other kings set out to attack Lower Assam. Under this plan, the Dwars were to



be attacked from two or three directions. Thousands of volunteers from Rambrai, Nongkhlaw, Jyrngam, Jirang, Nongstoin, Boko came to join the militia. The Garos pledged wholehearted support, the plain inhabitants had lent assistance in other ways. The Garos, the Assamese, the Rabhas, the Lalungs, the Mikirs and Shyams (Burmese volunteers) all joined Tirot Singh. A high system of espionage was employed. The government establishments were to be fully destroyed. The kings also planned to attack Rani and march to Gauhati.

Lorshon of Rambrai announced : "We have suffered for the last fifty years. We were troubled first by the Shyams (Burmese). But they are gone. But reminders of theirs are still here, a few have joined us but many more have gone to serve the Sircar. Now the Pharengi (Englishmen) have come. They do not seem to stay here temporarily. We must succeed in the plan to overthrow them." Roo, the Boko Syiem stood up and elicited thus : "Our entire male population have pledged us solid support—to do and die in order to liberate this region". Simtoo Syiem in turn implored his friends thus. "We should demonstrate our strength. Unity should serve its purpose. Long live this confederacy we have built by our sweat." Lastly Tirot Singh summed up : "We must hold our dwars again. We must do our best to resist any reaction. We must impress upon Iskat that at any cost we shall not submit". Those parleys over, the expedition set out amidst the drumbeats and celebrations. On their way they were joined by a multitude both Khasi and Non-Khasi men. They pushed themselves against mountains and valleys carrying with them weapons (swords, shields, bows and arrows, musquets, spears), tools and implements, clothing, utensils, foodstuff packed up inside the haversacks, cones and baskets since they were determined to prolong their stay in the plains to six months' time until their mission was accomplished and the white men were finally ousted.



At any cost, the Dwars should be regained. Since they had always retained and managed almost in the full functional sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

It was January 9, 1831 at night time, a large party from Rambrai, Nongkhlaw and elsewhere swarmed themselves in full strength at Bungong. Here the revenue and police stations were burnt. Having ransacked it, the party split into two groups, the first group making way to Mongolbari hat near Bogy whereas the second, pressed themselves to Bardwar. But for the whole month, they spread all over the whole district west of Rani while the Nongstoin King conducted raids further to Goalpara. The Khasis thus occupied the tract of land which once formed part of their kingdoms. U Lorshon, U Tirot, U Simtoo, U Roo and the other kings declared that they had come down to occupy their Dwars. Other warriors raided Rani in revenge of its king being restored over that part of the Dwar over which Tirot Singh claimed himself its possessor. Mr. A. White, Foujdary Assistant reported thus : "As far as I can learn this object of the combination was to expel the officers of the British Government adjacent to the hills so that the Cossyas and the Garrows might enjoy the share in the produce of the soil which they were wont to do so when under the Assam Government".<sup>2</sup> The Rajahs used force to silence opposition to them. The force exacted provisions from the inhabitants, they asked them now to cut off their allegiance to the government and to furnish them assistance. And so, (the record says) : "The whole population of Bardwar and Pantan

<sup>1</sup> Scot wrote to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary in 1831 :

"At the time of our accession to the Government of the country, the chiefs of the dwars exercised criminal justice and made war upon each other with perfect impunity or the worst, subject to the payment for forgiveness of a fine. Under the Assam Government, the estates forming the dwars had not paid any regular annual revenue, but large sums were exacted on the occasion of the accession of the new chief, and raised by contributions on people, and they were bound to furnish poyiks for the public service. The arrangement was commuted for a money payment."

<sup>2</sup> Assam government implies the *loose* or *nominal* sovereignty exercised by the Ahom King whereas the *functional* sovereignty and *day-to-day* administration were operated by the Khasi Kings.



were sworn to exert themselves to their utmost to 'expel the British authorities from the District'. As David Scott, however, suspected that 'there is every reason that the eruption of the mountaineers was favoured and connived at by the local authorities most of them are necessarily ill effected towards the Government owing to the strict control now exercised over them and to their deprivation of the illicit emoluments they used to derive from fines, from criminal and other illegal fines which they were in the habit of levying under the Assam Government'.

The Khasis were first successful and Tirot Singh emerged with flying colours although it was to be a temporary sway. They took advantage of the absence of the regiments near Gauhati who were withdrawn elsewhere. Capt. A White present with a handful of havildars of the Assam Light Infantry were helpless. An alarm was sent to Mr. Scott. But on 16th January, the alarm was superseded by another message in which White informed that the Khasis at Bardwar were subdued by the Havildars of his party. But soon he found that the situation was far from correct as he had put it up since the Khasis with more strength drawn from the hills renewed their attacks and caused more havocs. The news of the second invasion reached Mr. Scott who now requisitioned Lieutenant Flower to subdue the marauders. But Flower with a small resource was at a loss to deal with the situation for he succeeded only to locate some of their positions. The administration was paralysed and communication was disrupted with the outside world. Even Scott was almost giving hope to reestablish the British position. Scott, therefore, requisitioned Captain Haslam with a larger reinforcement. Meanwhile the Khasis attacked Rani and were lurking nearer to Gauhati. The contemporary record shows that Haslam's performance was far from satisfactory unlike Lister who usually succeeded to follow the war men to their strongholds. But Haslam's operation was not to be blamed. His force was inadequate and he had a difficult time in which he was to clear the plains of the marauders. So Mr. Scott was not justified to condemn Haslam. Haslam, however, managed to clear some pockets but the khasis provoked the



authority by shifting from place to place and creating ravages everywhere. They used different passes to recover their position. This situation continued for the whole month. Captain Haslam by the close of January pushed himself up the hills, but the Khasis having occupied a pass at Bardwar resisted his advance for some time. The Khasis kept that pass and obstructed Haslam's passage to the hills in which their 400 men, 40 Garos, 40 Manns with musquets and other 1000 inhabitants had occupied it. It was covered by a heavy jungle on either side and it was known that the inhabitants of the villages of Annah Muddapore Mudaae Ahug and Boonberry were encamped there. A scout who was sent to collect information had fallen a sacrifice and was cut up to pieces by the warriors.

Haslam had heard that the enemy<sup>6</sup> is commanded by Lall Churn Singh and Tirot Singh and Oomar Garrow'. Almost all the Dwars had suffered on account of the Khasi assaults. Haslam remained helpless and failed to stop it.

On February 3, the Nongwah-Rani King accompanied by 70 armed men stole by another pass from the rear to Haslam at the vicinity of the pass, who asked Haslam's help to defend his state against the wanton attacks of the warriors. Haslam provided 20 armed men to accompany him to Desh Ranee. Haslam, having not been able to cope with the situation, later on abandoned the pass and proceeded to guard Boko against assaults in that quarter. It is clear in that the Rani King's presence at Haslam's camp indicated that his kingdom had suffered reverses and that his life was in danger during his return to his headquarters.

Tirot and Lorshon sustained themselves for some time. The situation, if it were to continue, would affect the British prestige very much. So Mr. Scott exerted pressure and called for fresh reinforcements. His diplomacy paid its dividend in his observation that the Khasis should now be attacked from the hills. If he succeeded, he would at least save the Dwars from occupation of the Khasis and restore confidence in the government. Scott now offered to David Hay Brodie this task. The latter was equally determined to weaken and suppress the western kings.



This is the story of another brilliant English officer who led an expedition from Nongkhlaw to Nongstoin via Rambrai—Myriaw-Jyrngam to subjugate these westerners. He took with him some Shyams and Khasis of a meagre number. He needed not too many hands. He took advantage to surprise the defenceless villages, the menfolk of whom were now concentrated at the plain.

Tirot Singh committed a blunder since he did not foresee to any possible retaliatory plan that the Englishmen could cause an attack from that corner which again would lead to the weakening of his position in lower Assam. So most of the villages were defenceless. In fact David Hay Brodie during his campaign, encountered more with the natural obstacles and odds than with human resistance on his way which gave this young soldier an opportune time. But for the Khasis it was a grim time since most of the villages had been deserted while at the other places, only a few aged men and children were available. Nature was also indirectly helpful since it was not yet a full rainy season. The route in which he passed through was empty except a few peasants and woodmen in some villages approached. He told that on one occasion he came across a few young men who when seeing him, turned away and then yelled, danced and sang (at the top of their voice). So his task was easy. His plan was to deal effectively with the so-called outlaws and pay back in their coins. A severe punishment was to be inflicted upon Rambrai but the other counterparts who had dared challenge Mr. Scott should be taught a full lesson. In fact he was more witty and clever as strategist.

However, David H. Brodie would have failed if he was faced with a guerrilla and the war would have been prolonged. Probably Mr. Scott gave more time to provide him effective instruction from his own experience. Mr. Scott furnished him local scouts and skillful fighters, both the Shyam and the Khasis were brave and efficient.

David Hay Brodie passed along a road to Rambrai. He demonstrated his authority by burning the villages of Nongjew and



Nonglang when he visited Rambrai. Perhaps he enjoyed seeing women and children running out while their possessions were consumed by the devastating fire. The news would have run fast to Jyrngam that when he reached there, Pokko Jhalook, its Rajah came out to negotiate with a new Englishman little of whom was known. Brodie insisted upon him to accept the treaty and record his submission. Jhalook consented but he told Brodie that the treaty had to be confirmed by his uncle U Roo Rajah and Suman his co-equal partner. Pokko Jhalook promised to pay an indemnity and set free the Assamese persons carried off during the last invasion of the plain. Brodie took prisoner of U Rupa Lyngdoh who had joined U Roo during a recent raid. Brodie however inflicted punishment by burning more villages. He set off westward and passed on his way through Nongsingpho, Nongkumah (comprised in Panbaree), Nongryniaw and Nongryns over which a Deman Rajah governed. He had reached Nongstoin but was taken ill and brought to Nongkhlaw on April 20 1831 where he died on 23rd of that month. Before being brought to Nongstoin he had reached other villages such as Mikor, Musarah and Rongsah.

Scott painfully remarked that Brodie's death recorded the loss to the Company of the most gallant, enterprising and zealous young officer. Almost all the western states were covered up by Brodie in which he was able to exact terms upon them.

It was true that Brodie accomplished within so short a time the subjugation of these marauding tribes while the several companies of Sepahees were unable to quell them in three months time. Scott was also mistaken, in that no clear direction was issued to Haslam to effect an operation on the hills, as he appeared all the time, to have complied with Mr. Scott's instruction to attack the Khasis from the plains. Indeed, Mr. Scott would have wished that Brodie would have lived longer, but Brodie had changed the course of events and had thereby reduced the duration of the war in which his successors would have considerable time to consolidate the British creation in North-East.

We should note too that the Garos were not fully united



among themselves in siding with Tirot Singh. In fact on January 13, 1831, a Garo spy engaged by the government named Meg Narain killed another Garo known as Sidar Sunga Deka and produced his head before David Scott who awarded him 100 sika rupees. It is said that he worked for 2 years at Bogy, Bungong and Luki and played his role in assisting the British government to intercept the raiders. However up to 1834, many Garos loyal to Tirot Singh came out to submit to the British government together with some Khasi leaders.

Scott much relieved observed thus : "Under the above circumstances, I am of the opinion, that the only course that can advantageously be pursued, is the reduction to practical subjection, the tribes bordering on the dewars, who have perpetrated the late outrages, and who are at present independent on our authority; and establishing amongst them, the same sort of internal Government, which has been maintained among the Garos of the north-east parts of Rungpoor, since the year 1817". Mr. Scott's great degree of confidence was also gathered from his letter written to Fort William thus : "the Ensign Brodie attached to Sylhet local corps with a very small party of Cosseahs and Shyams, had since penetrated Rambrai and reduced to submission several refractory chiefs in that quarter. . . . The means now prove much more effectual towards restoring tranquillity in the hills than the employment of a large body of regular troops, the invalidity of which has been exemplified in the Assam dewars, where with four or five companies of Sepahees, Captain Haslam was not once able to the course to two months to come into effectual contact with the enemy". This too proves us a lesson that the East India Company had on the different occasions, successfully averted the disastrous crises, by availing a small body of competent persons than a large number of men and the lesson remains to us that true intelligence at times, may not require too many hands to execute such concrete policies as applied to such issues as could be fitting in with such given conditions. Strength at times may depend more on the efficacy of quality than quantity. David Hay Brodie's timely action in averting



further British losses gave an advantage to David Scott who was watching the developments sometimes with hope and sometimes with despair. All these things ought not be lost sight of and for which, communications in these trends had to be made with the Supreme power at Fort William, Calcutta.

The coming into terms of other western Rajahs was a severe blow to Tirot Singh who always assumed that his territory should not be conquered. He was driven now to no alternative except to stand unconquered in this great contest for mastery.

It was a bolt from the blue, when he found that the circumstances were such when the western Syiems, under one stroke of diplomacy, were restored to their allegiances with the company. Parting off company, they perhaps bade good bye to him and assured their cooperation indirectly in the long struggle which he was destined to continue. He was hearing daily of the penalties meted out, the reckless burning of villages, the destruction of grains and cattle, the exorbitant fines imposed and the new treaties executed with his close allies. He could keep liaison now with a few Rajahs only. He asked to himself—"Where are those multitude?" he counted on the resources that he still could cope. About getting of arms, there was to be not much problem because some outside Rajahs could supply him. So before coming back to the hills, he tried to collect resources as possibly he could with the intention to renew the struggle. This was surely the unconquered hero. He was also pained with the suffering of the uncountable number of the inhabitants, some died of plague and epidemics, others underwent starvation, many killed by soldiers, others died during the destruction of villages. He saw the cultivation at standstill, disruption in trade, increase in crimes and other problems loomed large. Many villagers were forced to live as vagabonds, some having lost forever their possessions, were reduced to jungle or cave dwellings in which the tears in everybody's eyes could not help bursting out. But he was not to learn from defeats. We now examine some consequences of Brodie's successful expedition.

Nongstoin, hitherto a neutral state, had also suffered adversely



during the late uprisings. The Syiem changed his mind and later on joined in this movement and as a result the villages located in this Dwars were taken away and added to the government possession at the Goalpara District. Trying of strength gave rise to riddles. We find Brodie, on one occasion, tried to trap Mon Bhut by a simple trick. The Memoir of David Scott tells us that disguised as a Sebundy Sepoy, with his face and legs blackened out, he started from Nongkhlaw, accompanied "by a sepoy of tried courage and two Cossyachs in our interest. When near Mon Bhut's haunts; the Cossyachs were led by ropes, as if Ensign Brodie and the sepoy were returning with them as prisoners, from an expedition but, although he sojourned sometime in the neighbourhood, the ruse did not take effect; Mon Bhut was either absent, or did not choose to risk an encounter with two practices shots, of whose reputation he no doubts too had heard".

As a consequence, Tirot Singh, lost several allies such as U Long Rajah of Panbari, U Run Rajah of Longlang, Jubbur sah of Nogalut, 'Hebooroo Lyngdo of Nowamas. U Roo executed a treaty on April 6, 1831 in which, he pledged himself to be loyal to the Sircar and for 'the due fulfilment of this Agreement, one of my nephews shall be made over in pledge to the Sircar'. And he promised to surrender such rebels he could find. On April 9, 1831 Simtoo Sing (Sinto Sing) of Mookay agreed to make good the losses and "until these are made good, my nephew Baman Sing Shau remain a pledge with the Sircar". He also agreed to deliver a he-goat from each village to fulfil the obligation of giving *Nazzurs* and to join the Sircar against other enemy when called so. Treaties to the same effect, terms and conditions were executed with the other Rajahs named above, Tirot Singh's resources being speedily diminishing. Yet, in spite of that, his indomitable mind still conceived plans to resist the British operations and cause incumbrances to their consolidation of conquest. His source of sustenance was not confined only to Jidor Sing, U Subha, Man Kumar, Mon-but, Lorshai and a few other commanders.



According to one report, Mr C. E. Trevelyan, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, received a message from the Local Government as follows :

“On the subject of rent to be agreed to be paid by the Chieftains of Ramrye (Rambrai), I find correspondence..... The above rent is in lieu of a fine amounting to 5000 rupees imposed on the State ..... for being principally concerned with several other chiefs in a very atrocious inroad in 1831 ..... The damage sustained by the Assam Ryots were appraised at 15,000 rupees of which 5,000 rupees as above imposed on the Chief of Ramrye and 10,000 rupees on the Chiefs of six other States ..... These six Chiefs agreed to pay 7,950 rupees to which Mr. Scott apparently consented. The break-up is given below :

Poko Jalaka	..	2000
Olung Rajah	..	1000
Sindhoo Rajah	..	1000
Simtoo Singh	..	2200
Echaroo Lungdoo	..	150
Ooroo Rajah	..	1600
Total		Rs. 7950

Thus a severe punishment followed upon the recalcitrant kings for disobeying the government. Other damages were also done to teach them a lesson.

While these schemes were taking shape, death occurred of David Scott in August 1831. His death was deeply lamented by his associates. An architect of British administration in North-East India, Scott had laid down the foundation, which his successors were bound to follow up consistently. By the dint of his ingenuity and fertility of the mind, he had conceived and brought forth the new creations which remained intact throughout the British regime. But he died in an unfinished work because he had not subjugated Tirot Singh, Bor Manik, Muken Sing and Lorshon and with them, the large number of their followers. An honest biographer, therefore, would be prepared to conclude that whereas an immediate victory was for Tirot



Singh, Scott's success on the other hand was more of a permanent nature because in his successors, Scott obtained an instrument to vanquish Tirot Singh and thereby perpetuate his creations as long as the sun of the British empire shone bright in this country. The contest was in fact confined between Tirot and Scott, the latter being looked upon as a British instrument whereas the former was considered as a champion of a confederacy.

This calamity which occurred from a prolonged Khasi war was even resented also by future officers attached to Governor-General. They observed that it was Scott who undermined the course of these insurrections and he had failed during his life time to suppress them. So Mr. Scott's policy was severely criticised. "The Khasis had also reason to complaint of the insolent tone and oppressive conduct on the part of our inferior officers."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Scott although a highly competent and valued officer, had failed in making a true calculation before the outbreak of the war. A complaint was made of a huge investment for the construction of bungalows and rest houses during which destruction, part of government money was wasted away and in which the incurred sums for these establishments were written off. Besides a large amount of money was earmarked for paying compensations to the families of the bereaved. It was noted also that a European convalescent camp raised and maintained was wholly unprotected. A long number of years was spent in subjugating Tirot in which immense difficulties were faced. But Scott's master mind, by stroke of his strong diplomatic wits and competence, had really upturned the history of India's North-East.

Tirot Singh was looking for another chance to strike at things. His strategy now was to be in the Sylhet side. He was waiting for the advent of the winter season to execute his plan.

He had exerted himself so much so and at times was taken ill and suffered other calamities. Now only a few persons true to him did the work. Still he was bent upon presenting other difficulties to the administration and pressurising the plain in-

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<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Hon'ble Sir C.T. Maccalfe; Governor-General, Pol. Dept. 25-1835.



habitants now in Sylhet as such situation would be helpful to grasp an advantage.

Early in November, 1831 the government had received intelligence of about 300 armed men assembled at Dwara Nongtyrnem. They had 20 fire-locks and ball ammunitions and were undertaking training and practising at targets. The Sylhet authorities had made known on November 3 to Captain Lister that a party of 60 or 70 men had been for three days near the villages of Thiedding, Tynrong and Mustoh and were getting other men to join them at Dwara Nongtyrnem. The number of men at Nongtyrnem was rapidly swelling. "They had a debate last Sunday and decided upon ransacking the company's villages about Maram and Bungong which they intend doing very soon after the new moon. U Ron Kongor, U Mansing and U Jidor were at the head of the party."

On November 6, 1831 Inglis from Sylhet reported that he had arranged his spies to visit the villages about "Maram Bungong and some other areas at the same place tomorrow night".

On the 12th of November, the incident took place in which two men were killed and a third person wounded with an arrow below Sohbar and near Panduah. Raja Suba Sing of Cherrapunji who succeeded late Duwan informed the government that he had sent out spies to find out the culprits. He objected to the police action on Panduah to close down markets to Khasis and on November 4 issued a letter in which he expressed thus "I am hopeful that you will issue the necessary order for conducting the business of the Raj as hear-to-fore" The letter was addressed to the Acting Agent to Governor-General in Sylhet.

The Secretary to the Governor-General came to know that the Khasis were carrying out depredations of raids in Sylhet, burning several villages, killing and wounding many persons.

News reached the Sylhet Civil station that on December 26, the villages of Alumkane and Peeshugun located in Pergunnah of Chamtoola and Bestullah (comprised in Borahea pergunnah), were attacked and set to fire and the Khasis had looted the in-



habitants of their belongings. Reports came that Monbhut and Subha (Tirot's brother) led this excursion.

Before any action was taken, news followed that the former party has joined another party led by U Rin Moolock, Sumer and U Wan from Lawbah, Mawdon bazar and Mawsynram who perpetrated a raid at Banstollah, Fiskurkong and Alamkohee in which six villages were ravaged. The marauders carried off one hundred cattle and other things to the hills. The mountaineers had caused untold devastation and held the inhabitants in the grip of terror.

Now it was incumbent on the administration to take effective steps to control the situation. Action to be undertaken both by Sylhet authority and the Hills Agency was to be coordinated. A force should be stationed to protect the area from further ravages and a counter-assault to follow the marauders, should be launched. The government and the Sohra Syiem engaged many spies for this. The government ordered that the capture of the leaders and of Monbhut, this time should be possible.

Captain F. G. Lister being directed by Mr. Cracroft, Acting Agent to the Governor-General to quell these troubles made a strenuous march to Mawsynram-Lawbah side in search of those dacoits. The trace would not be that much difficult on account of a big herd of cattle taken off and moving up at their snail's pace to the hills led by the cattle lifters, their new masters expose to the view of others. The task for the spies of pro-government party was made easy. U Suba Singh clapped his hands and others were happy since the arrest of Mon Bhut and Subha appeared to be fulfilled now, so exhausted of their resources. Already cattle-lifters might have been arrested and through them, others involved in a raid. Mon Bhut's encounter with Lister in a following skirmish was by no means easy.

Mon Bhut had already left the plain. His spies kept him informed too of Lister's advent. He would have wished to tackle it in the mountain fastness. He did not have time further to ensconce himself to the more precipitous side somewhere in Maharam where that English Captain would have found more



obstacles. Probably his party had been dispersed to keep their positions elsewhere. It was on December 31, 1830 in evening and the whole night following that a battle occurred with Lister near Mawsynram but the scene of that battle also shifted to Shella. Lister had a more advantageous position because of the fresh reinforcement he drew from the plains and because Mon Bhut was left with less local veterans who could be good guides. So Mon Bhut could not do well as in the other scenes he had dominated previously. This appears to be one of the reasons for which Tirot Singh resented because of these mistakes committed. In his absence, on this occasion, Subha was attached to Mon Bhut but it appears he had not the skill and experience like Tirot in the war (southern) cliffs. It appears that Mon Bhut still kept the southern region for sometime more. So these thrilling war scenes by no means can be kept away from this biography. The situation turned easier, the tradition has it, because some men from Shella and Sohra gave immense help to Lister.

It appears that Tirot Singh was so much depressed and made no more plan to raid the plains. Meantime, he was engaged to pressuring the administration by other means.

Tirot Singh worn out with fatigue and over exertion since 1826 remarked : "I have done my best to save ourselves. At one time we drew to our banner thousands and thousands of men but you see now my closest colleagues have forsaken me. Bor Manik had been away to look up for assistance from the Maka-shang (Himalaya) and Patkoi mountains. My own brother Nirod seems to be tired and my cousin Jid hinted on several occasions that we start negotiation with the Pharengis through Sing Manik or independently. How can I do that? I can not go against the principles which I have announced that nothing short of a fully sovereign status should be restored to me. Uncle Ron is still fresh in the field. I will persist on which comrade Lorchon who is still exerting pressure to recover the lost ground. I thank you my country men from near and far who are to us the source of inspiration. Had my partners persisted on the same footing, we would have won over our enemy".

The atmosphere by the beginning of 1832, was waning since Tirot Singh was trying to understand matter with Bor Manik and Lorshor on a new level. There was an interchange of envoys with other parties. None of the British allies or other Kings, however, dared cause his surrender. Meanwhile, the British government changed their policy and sought to deal with the outlaws more leniently. The other kings reported that they would help to conduct any parleys if Tirot Singh desired it. It is clear that they wanted to shackle responsibility but the situation seems to have been radically changed because the second alliance formed after U Roo and western Kings joined had become considerably weakened although Tirot still commanded considerably support from the other ranks and files.



## Arbitration

IN COURSE OF time, Tirot Singh's position became weakened since, treaties were imposed upon his allies. In September 1831, W. Cracroft succeeded Mr. Scott as the officiating Agent to the Governor General. At the same time, Lt. H. Rutherford, Assistant Political Agent, was authorised to review the position to enable the East India Company adopt conciliatory policy towards pacifying the hills. Rutherford was thus engaged in obtaining requisite intelligence about the insurrectionaries.

Reports, however, came that Tirot Singh was still at large with his followers; he had prolonged negotiations with Bor Manik who had advised other kings also that they should not take any responsibility to cause Tirot Singh's capture. In fact several sections of the people were rendering assistance to Tirot Singh.

There were clear instances too that the people from Sohra were providing assistance with men and money to Tirot Singh. No effective device had so yet been formulated to reduce him completely. The government announced a conciliatory attitude to those who would come up to surrender except of course in the case of Tirot Singh because he was responsible for waging a war with the government. The government summed up their reaction as follows : 'Fugitive Khosseahs should surrender themselves and to all who do so voluntarily, life might be guaranteed without exception; but liberty which implies impunity, cannot in the opinion of the Vice President-in-Council be extended to Tirot Singh or the instigators and chief perpetrators of the massacre at Nunklow. Those who are concerned merely as servants of the chief, acting in obedience to his orders, might have liberty



assured to them provided that there should be sufficient reason to rely in their future conduct." The circular bearing this message was sent to all. Yet several persons in different states had liaison with Tirot Singh so that Suba of Sohra openly confessed that he was powerless to resist such communication; Sohra thus became the centre for both arbitrants and patriots. The situation dragged on so that H. Rutherford recommended during June 1832 that in view of these difficulties confronted to government an opportunity should be exploited to establish the government position upon a portion of mountains provided 'we did not seek to subject the whole region to our sway.'<sup>1</sup>

Further, Rutherford complained of several ambuscades that passers-by on highways met from time to time which created difficulties to government transport. He reported that on June 13, 1832 an ambush against him was laid on his way from Mairang to Sohra by a group of warriors in which their leader rushed at one of the sepoy, snatched his gun and killed him. Eight of them were armed with muskets, dressed in red cloth jackets, the leader having been able to cut off the head of his victim almost instantaneously and with utmost speed, who to Rutherford appeared to be a demonstration of 'their extreme boldness ? One warrior killed during the skirmish, was later on identified as U Tar, U Tirot's follower.' The incident evinced 'little inclination on the part of Tirot Singh's party to come to an amicable settlement'. Another similar report was also submitted by Dr. Morton who narrowly escaped in an ambuscade laid against him at almost the same time.

In the meantime, a rigid economic blockade imposed by government hit hard the people, cultivation and other works being adversely affected on account of these wars that had dragged, several villagers having lost possessions containing jewels, gold and silver ornaments. Trade had very much dwindled. Tirot Singh, on the other hand, continued to obtain the necessary provision with the help of his friends; the tradition says that Moniram and other Assamese men in the plains continuously

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<sup>1</sup> For 1832. Dept. Pol. Con. 9 July No. 89.



sent him supplies. Bor Manik and Jidor Sing on the other hand successfully coped with this problem in having reached food-stuffs to many places. Iron-smelting likewise suffered since the government had sought to diminish the production of weapons, and many iron-smelters were dispersed to other places being forced to change their way of life. Cracroft was relieved when Mr. T. C. Robertson joined the post of Political Agent. Robertson recommended the armament of loyal Khasis which should enable them to cope with the defence of the villages in the event of any attack inflicted upon them by anti-government groups. G. W. Swinton, Chief Secretary to government thus instructed Robertson: 'The Vice-President in-charge relied on your discretion as to putting fire arms into the hands of any Kossiah tribe which may be advisable or otherwise according to the degree of confidence that might be justly reposed in their fidelity and adherence' and to take measures for procuring sixty jackets to be made for parties in quest.<sup>1</sup> In August 1832, Robertson was authorised to invest Captain Lister with a power of stopping bazars whenever he found it needful and detaining suspected persons as well as known enemies.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, a larger detachment of 100 Goalpara Sebundees, 100 Mans and a sufficient number of Gurghas was added to the government force. The government also followed up the previous proposal to carve out suitable European cantonment and sanitoria. In course of time, it was proposed to bring 100 European convalescent soldiers to Sohra and the number of the armed Khasis was also increased.

Tirot Singh was very much handicapped on account of the withdrawal of his allies, since the government had managed to conciliate themselves with the Syiems, under such terms and conditions, which in the long run would be very advantageous to the authorities. The authorities announced to treat Tirot Singh on a different footing. The government did not rest to find

<sup>1</sup> Book No. 8 (Volume of letters received from govt.), pp. 543-44 of 1832.

<sup>2</sup> Book No. 8A (Volume of letters received from govt.) pp. 633-36 of 1832.



out means to get his surrender. But all influential persons such as Lursee (probably Lurshai), the Mairang Sirdar and Jidor Sing declared openly that they would never act as his traitors while Tirot Singh's men moved from place to place and threatened the other Syiems with dire consequences should they assist in handing him over. Thus Robertson had no other means other than to disband and isolate Tirot Singh, who was still a stumbling block to the government in their plan to consolidate their administration both in the Khasi Hills and the entire region. U Bor Manik in spite of the treaty that bounded him had never been inclined to surrender to the government. He was still a moving spirit behind Tirot Singh's movement in the last days of the war. U Lorshon and Bor Manik held Durbars on several occasions to solicit support from their countrymen and uphold Tirot Singh.

Tirot Singh had lived and seen to these things. He saw to the new plight of circumstances and situations to which he was placed and was, perhaps, counting on the days that would lead soon to the subjugation of his country. But he still had the support of a great number of the common people. His followers never dared keep away from the pledge they made to him. It was his great magnetic personality that reposed and inspired confidence to the masses of his followers even at the darkest hours of insecurity and uncertainty. Thus it was reported: "So long Tirot was at large, a feeling of loyalty or at least to save him would ever operate to keep alive the spirit of resistance even among those who were professedly friendly to British." In these circumstances, the government could not use compulsion to break off that unflinching loyalty of the people to his cause.

Tirot was forced to count on many reverses; this was due to the long absence of Bor Manik, who, the tradition suggests had gone to the Himalayas to seek help from Bhutan and other places. It was at this juncture that the government exploited an opportune situation to weaken Tirot and deprive him of support.

During the summer of 1832, a little earlier to the arrival of Mr. Rutherford, Mr. Funcwick who was attached to late



Mr. Scott for supply and construction, had already entered into rounds of negotiations with Muken Sing of Mawsmat. An interview was finally arranged in which Muken finally came to appear before Mr. Funcwick, Muken being accompanied by six armed attendants. The record has it that Muken's submission was obtained in September 1832 for which he was granted a monthly allowance on being confined in Sylhet. The records do not indicate clearly whether his captivity was effected through the truce conducted by Mr. Funcwick which the officers on this occasion, used it as a gesture to evince that Muken had come voluntarily to tender his allegiance. In the case of Bor Manik, it was otherwise since it was during an interview that he was taken prisoner. The tradition recounts that Tirot Singh, Muken and Bor Manik were cheated to force their surrender. The fact was that Muken was sent as prisoner to Sylhet to spend for the rest of his life showed that all was not well in his treatment.

An illustrious fighter who next parted off company was U Mon Bhut. According to the record : "In a quarrel with one of the followers of Tirot Singh, his immediate chieftain, he either killed or severely wounded him; and dreading that Tirot Singh, would punish him with death, sought an asylum in the remote villages of his countrymen; but having at length obtained a promise that his life should be spared, he surrendered himself on October 1832, to Lieutenant Townsend, then commanding at Nongkhalaw". On submitting to government C.E. Trevelyan, Chief Secretary of the Bengal government justly observed that Mon Bhut was induced to deliver up by the promise of provision as it occurred in 1832 and "as we ourselves seduced him from his allegiance we cannot justly object to him that he is a deserter and betrayer of his Rajah". We have also mentioned how the other kings of the north and west such as Boko, Longlang, Nongkalut, Mokay, Jyrngam, Nowamas, Panbaree had already been brought to terms with government in 1831. Taking advantage of Bor Manik's prolonged absence, Lister acted promptly by making use of negotiations that led to the submission of U Ram Sing of Maharam and U Ksan of Malai Sohmat in a treaty

pledged with government in November, 1832 and of U Phar of Bhowal in December 1832.

It is not known who that person killed by U Mon Bhut was but he must have been the most valued of Tirot's men. I believe that Tirot Singh also resented Mon Bhut's action for certain reasons. After his service was terminated no one knows how Mon Bhut spent the last days of his life. The unflinching adherence of Tirot's supporters became more and more diminished.

What embittered Tirot most was Mon Bhut's desertion and Muken's fall. These two in fact were the strongest of his pillars, upon whose exertions, the success of his operation always depended. Tirot Singh was also grieved as days passed by with the new administrative arrangement, the British exactions upon the belligerent villages, the detachment of the Dwars from the Syiems' dominions and curtailment of their liberties.

The signs of unrest had not been wiped out since an official in 1832 wrote thus : "From information lately received I have reason to suspect that a considerable sum of money has been advanced to Tirot by the heads of villages in the immediate vicinity of this place, and I am disposed that his followers some time obtain supplies of provisions through the people of Cherra. I have also learnt that not six weeks ago, Tirot Singh had conference which lasted for three weeks with Bur Manick, the Chief of Moleem. This Bur Manick is the individual who came or was brought into Mr. Scott, and was by him thrown into irons and at last released upon agreeing to pay a fine of Rs. 5,000 of which nothing as yet has been realised".

Suspicion of U Bor Manik's connivance with U Tirot Singh went on until their downfall. In the middle of 1832, Robertson wrote to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary thus : 'the behaviour of Bur Manick whose dominion lies in the same quarter has been less satisfactory and indeed I have strong reason to suppose that he has secretly fomented hostility and been one of the chief contributors to those being whom we are opposed'. He suggested in the event of his being more hostile, Bor Manik should be detained in the custody of the Magistrate at Sylhet. It was also



noted that U Ron Kongor of Nongkhlaw had been to Sushang in the Garo Hills where he purchased a number of muskets and large quantity of ammunitions. It was learnt that these purchases were transacted through the Omla of the Sushang Rajah.

The tradition says that Bor Manik had been absent for six months past before the collapse of this movement, his whereabouts being known only to his confidential advisers. Although old in age, yet Bor Manik still young in spirits, had gone somewhere to obtain help from outside. He had seen the plight of circumstances and wanted to avail himself help to continue this struggle. Robertson had recommended upon the necessary measures to be taken to obtain his capture and exile to Sylhet. The authorities had been very vigilant but Bor Manik successfully eluded and obtained shelter both in the hills and plains. No record bearing on his final capture had been obtained, the Sohra authorities could not provide clue to his whereabouts in their correspondence made with the Supreme Government at Fort William.

We also learn that the situation rapidly changed after Bor Manik's departure for an unknown destination. But it was known that some secret negotiations had passed on between Tirot Singh and Sing Manik. As such a change in the course of events had become unavoidable. This finally led to a truce being arranged with the government. This event occurred at the time when both Lorshon and Bor Manik were away. May be some of his own comrades had persuaded Tirot Singh to see to some good results. It might be suspected that Sing Manik exploited the situation to initiate any negotiation between Tirot and the Englishmen. Tirot Singh, compelled by circumstances, owing to a constant warfare, resulting in trade deadlock, might have been prone to try his luck in compelling the Englishmen quit Khasi land or also, in taking advantage of a chance for truce, to rally a new force and ultimately to fight with the intruders into his sacred soil. Face to face talks could be helpful.

Tirot Singh, most probably had accepted Sing Manik's plea



for starting negotiations with his antagonists to impress upon the British administration that he had to wage war because of David Scott's faults in violating the pledge which he had made and insist upon them to leave now and forever his kingdom. Sing Manik sent a message to Sohra regarding his acceptance of the truce for the first negotiation with this great hero. The venue for making the dialogue was fixed at Sing Manik's headquarters, Nongkrem. Having received the message, Robertson directed Capt. F. G. Lister and Lt. H. Rutherford to proceed to Nongkrem to meet them and "assemble all of the principal Cossaeh Chieftains to discuss the terms upon which they may be imposed to the paramount authority of the British Government. . . . . .

"Should the meeting not take place or fail of producing satisfactory results, you are requested to intimate to Sing Manik and the other Chieftains that they must break off all intercourse with the fugitives against whom after allowing them a reasonable time to retire from the scene of the conference, you are at liberty to direct measures to be renewed both on this quarter and by Lieutenant Townsend from the Nongkhlaw side".

As directed the officers proceeded to and reached Nongkrem on August 21, 1832. The next day was scheduled for an interview with Tirot Singh but he had not turned up until the evening hours when Sing Manik intimated to the English Deputies, a message from Tirot Singh who was lying in close vicinity with 250 followers and 40 musquets and that in the first instance, he would 'wish to see one of the officers' in which Ensign Brodie volunteered to go and went with a few sepoy. They met this lion, 'about a mile from our abode'. Tirot Singh objected to the venue of the meeting being held at the military tent for which it was then proposed to shift it to Sing Manik's residence under the proviso that 'we were to attend unarmed'. So on the appointed date came Tirot Singh accompanied by prince Jidor, nephew of the late Khulluck, Rajah of Mawmluh, Man Singh and Jit Rai his Myntris and Man Kumar and others. The interview took a dramatic turn when a Khasi lion proudly asserted his sovereign right and refused to acknowledge their paramount authority in



his land. So Tirot Singh addressed : "Therefore, I am here. You have broken your word of honour, and I have now only a word to say—if you want peace, quit this country at once, . . . . Out of the simplicity of my heart and in good faith, I allowed you to set foot on my soil. On your part, you have your word of honour that the life of my people will never be interfered with by your stay. . . . . You have been here only a few days, but this country is overflowed with tears and blood of my people. You have turned this land of sweet songs into the land of weeping."<sup>1</sup>

Lister insisted on the most cordial and conciliatory terms; he dwelt on the strength and the benevolent character of the British empire and its commitment to protect the weak sovereigns which should enable them to share the privileges of their administration as had been the case of the people of Sohra who enjoyed the bulk of trade and with such privileges could not be denied to the people of Nongkhlaw had they followed a similar conduct. The Ex-Rajah was promised to be restored on these terms and conditions, a guarantee was pledged to protect his dignity and honour as the Rajah of Nongkhlaw and Bardwar in the letter and spirit of the treaty he had conducted in 1826. Tirot Singh denounced the government's repressive measures upon his people since the treaty was concluded. He demanded the restoration of his kingdom in full sovereignty, the withdrawal of the posts at Mairang and Nongkhlaw and the abandonment of the road or its diversion somewhere. The meeting could not conclude on these terms and was adjourned to the next day. But on August 24, 1832 Tirot Singh did not turn up; the officers were then about to leave Nongkrem when Jit Rai and Man Singh Myntris called upon Lister and pronounced on the long warfare which had brought about constant sufferings upon the people. Lister made clear that the government would be willing to retain such relations with Nongkhlaw on the basis of the previous treaty and restore a successor to Tirot Singh but these things would be granted provided Tirot Singh's surrender could be made vertiable.

<sup>1</sup> V. G. Bareh, Drama U Tirot Singh.

Tirot Singh's men refused to comply with and betray their master. The Myntris on the negotiation resumed, demanded the abandonment of the road and objected to the surrender of Tirot Singh. The British deputies before departing assured the Myntris that these terms and conditions had again to be consulted with the higher authorities before anything concrete could be thrashed out. We believe this meeting in the absence of Rajah could not be counted valid although it could influence the course of future negotiation.

Sing Manik, however, continued liaison with the government with a view to reach an early settlement. Sing Manik's motives, however, could not be assessed correctly for on one hand, he kept such relations with Tirot Singh while, on the other hand, he assured the government that he was taking steps to pave the way for obtaining pacificism. I wrote earlier about Sing Manik's attitude thus: "Sing Manik.....had from the beginning formulated a neutral stand against the events." He was peaceful by nature; he appeared not so war like since he advocated moderate pursuits. He had the profound aspirations to clear the country of belligerence and he had a deep insight of further drastic consequences arising from the constant warfare. He acted as the mediator and arbitrator in the struggle.....The company hailed him as the honourable comrade". The situation had become complicated and Sing Manik, felt himself bound to intervene so as to quicken matters to bring an end to the long, harassing and tedious warfare and open the country to an era of constitutional settlement and social reconstruction. We should remember that the war had obliterated many villages so that cultivation and other enterprises, were badly effected, coupled with an effect from an economic blockade.

But if Sing Manik had obtained ascendancy to Khyrim through Bor Manik's consent, as both the tradition and records say, and though Bor Manik, still backed up U Tirot Singh till the end, with great sacrifices made. What this reading could really mean? Did it mean that Sing Manik really took the side of an opponent of Tirot Singh, the tradition says that Sing Manik of course was



far more successful in working out for a re-approach between the belligerent parties. Because of this and other problems the story of Tirot Singh's last days is obscure.

By the end of September or so, Robertson informed Swinton, Chief Secretary at Fort William that, he was waited upon by Sing Manik, at Sohra, "accompanied by a single individual, and he by no means an influential member of the hostile confederation at the earnest request of this chieftain who appears to be really anxious to effect an arrangement . . . . . I have consented to a suspension of any military operations against the hostile party until the 21st of this present month."

Nothing came out from the previous parleys. The Company, in such circumstances, was prone to take more time to reach an understanding with Tirot Singh and his followers. This compromising rather than repressive attitude was largely congenial which enabled the government to follow up cautiously such diplomatic measures to obtain Tirot Singh's downfall during this period of truce. In October 1832, the East India Company formulated an amnesty intended to be announced to him on the next meeting within the framework of the following conditions :

- (1) That Tirot Singh be freed on condition that his life was spared.
- (2) That a successor to him be nominated in accordance with the customs to be sanctioned by the East India Company and that a person so selected be confirmed to all the possessions and privileges formally enjoyed by Tirot Singh subject to such modifications to be worked out in future.
- (3) The amnesty among other kings, provided for the eligibility of the British government to construct a road and bridges with bungalows, stockades along the road within 100 yards from it and that the Head of the State should provide as many workmen as necessary towards its construction and repairs.
- (4) A proposal was put forward on the cession of the posts of Mairang and Nongkhlaw in absolute sove-

reignty to the government although the proposal to this clause was never implemented.

- (5) Provision of coolies, and materials, was another condition laid down towards the raising of posts at Mairang and Nongkhlaw.
- (6) In case of revenue that was not imposed, the authorities desired to take away a portion of grazing lands for keeping as many cattle, in which their care should devolve on Chieftains concerned.
- (7) Guilty persons, the Amnesty demanded, would be handed over to the government within the limits of the posts of Mairang and Nongkhlaw.
- (8) Any fine as imposed upon them should be delivered up accordingly.
- (9) The Amnesty was offered to the people of Nongkhlaw State. The people, on the other hand, were opposed to surrendering U Tirot Singh.

The time fixed for the truce would have expired and the government would have now embarked on resumption of hostilities. At this stage, Sing Manik appeared on the scene, and upon his intervention the time for the cessation of hostilities was extended. Further the government, at the same time, was negotiating with the parties concerned to find out a successor to Tirot Singh.

Another meeting came to be held on October 25, 1832. It was not difficult on the part of government to obtain the successor in the person of Jidor Sing who, at this meeting held, announced that 100 villages included in Tirot Singh's Raj on the side of Nongkhlaw and Mairang, agreed that Jidor Sing, "should succeed to Tirot Singh, and that Myntris agreed that Rijon Sing, should succeed to the Raj not until Jidor's death, and that Subha, Tirot's brother was with Tirot and with the latter's permission, would agree likewise". The Govt. Deputies were inclined to accept Jidor on conditions that Tirot Singh should be delivered up and on condition of his agreeing of paying an annual tribute of Rs. 1,500/- for a dependency of Mawmluh. Jidor firmly de-



clined to accept both the conditions on the question of payment of revenue, Jidor said on October 26 : "For the lands in the plains we can pay as before but in the hills it is not customary and we cannot agree to it. The people would not bear it". In the meeting, Sing Manik resented the contumacious attitude of Bor Manik, Duwan Sing (Dobasia or interpreter), U Jit Kongor both of Sohra, and U Long (The Jaintia Syiem's servant) which thus had prolonged this state of deadlock and which had hindered the progress of negotiation towards settlement. Jidor Sing was granted further term of 10 days to consider the government proposal, to consult the matter with other concerned. Jidor's reply was that he would either return with them or share the danger to which their continued hostility might expose him.

It was on October 20, 1832 that the next interview was to be granted to Tirot Singh and his party at Nongkrem, but he did not turn up on the plea of illness although it was believed that it was a mere fabrication. Tirot Singh's advisers who attended were given to understand of the implication of the above engagement being drawn up and without such engagement being subscribed to by the high contracting parties, the question of restoration of Tirot Singh's successor could never be decided. The British Deputies made clear these points. Tirot Singh's advisers, on the other hand rejected these arguments and boldly answered that all the irruptions lately perpetrated were to be traced to the insolent tone and oppressive conduct of the junior princes and servants belonging to the establishment of the company as the first treaty as such had come to be grossly violated. They lodged objections to the provisions of the new engagement whereas the first treaty, in those circumstances, was to be considered null and void. They were adamant to the point of surrendering Torit Singh. Discussions ranged to issues connected with the road construction. All these negotiations were ably managed while Tirot Singh, physically fatigued and mentally depressed as much as could be collected from the records, found the right excuse for not attending the meeting.

In the meantime, the deputies were authorised to promise,

that the Agent's influence should be exerted, in case of their compliance, to obtain from government restitution of all the lands formerly held by them in the valley of Assam.

It was at that time also that the conciliation of the more recalcitrant states such as Maharam, Bhowal, Dwara and Malai was obtained, to which a pledge was made that they should assist government to apprehend Tirot Singh. Capt. Lister was instructed 'to reduce them to submission by such means as he may deem it expedient'. Robertson's action in proposing such treaties to be made, was approved. Swinton thus replied Robertson: "You appear to have pointed out the most important stipulations to be made with the Chiefs who might be restored". In the meantime Jidor Sing had not turned up to intimate his decision on the question the restoration of Tirot Singh's successor. On this occasion, the government was exploring other means to apprehend Bor Manik. If Jidor kept silent, it proves that Tirot Singh still wielded good support.



## End of the Hero

HISTORY IS SILENT on the immediate development until the hero's final capture which came to occur in January 1833. The tradition more than once mentions that Bor Manik had been outside in search of help to strengthen Tirot's resources. Nothing more is heard of Sing Manik's move. The government policy was paying them dividends in that they successfully isolated him. The tradition provides other glimpses. It recounts during this time, Jidor Sing went to Gauhati to receive Bor Manik who was coming home. Tirot Singh, in the meantime was cluding with his followers at Lum Sangmein<sup>1</sup> in the lower spur of Shillong peak, believed to be an abode of Shillong, the most powerful of Khasi Gods. Here he was camping for the last three months of his life. He had come here for obtaining spiritual refuge and blessings for impairing strength and dignity. Up-till the Nongkrem truce in August, 1832 he was still at large with his friends and acquaintances, he had visited other states and received shelter and help. Since then, rapid steps were taken to isolate him. His only companions who clung tenaciously to him were Lorshon and Bor Manik. Lorshon, the tradition says, was seeking reinforcements from the west whereas Bor Manik went outside to seek assistance from other parties. The government had tarried also to resume hostilities during the winter months. Other circumstances were not clearly indicated leading to the collapse of this hero.

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<sup>1</sup> Located near Laitkar peak on the present shillong town's suburbs not far from Shillong-Towai Road.

The end of Tirot Singh's career has obtained a different interpretation. The tradition says that he was taken prisoner during an armistice with the government personnel during the cold months of the year. The tradition is rather emphatic upon the point that his capture was obtained in a state of confusion in which betrayal had its part affected by a few Syiems and he was handed over on that grim day on the pretext of an armistice thus held for conducting further terms. The tradition says that the government took advantage of both Bor Manik's and Jidor Sing's prolonged absence and apprehending that their return would lead to another deadlock, thereupon, seized this opportunity, to settle this matter, once for all, for both Robertson and Lister, were convinced, that as long as Tirot Singh was alive, his people could not be checked from making such incursions which were taxing so much upon the government. Moreover Jidor Sing's whereabouts since the last interview at Sohra in October were not known in the record but he had given his word, that he would either return or join Tirot Singh's camp. He had himself been taking side with the belligerent parties for so long though we suggested that he had gone down to Gauhati to wait upon Bor Manik's return. In the absence of his compatriots, Jidor Sing and Bor Manik, Tirot Singh was facing a dilemma. He had now confined himself to the help and counsel of his few Myntris. The tradition agrees that his last days were gloomy, that he shared a similar fate with other martyrs in the freedom struggle.

The government record gives otherwise a different picture. It suggests that on January 9, 1833, Tirot Singh deputed his confidential Myntri, U Jit Roy to intimate to Hari Saheb, Lt., H. Inglis then commanding a post at Um Shyllong in close vicinity of Lum Sangmein about his surrender. The message was not conducted through Sing Manik, the King of Khyrim. H. Inglis accepted the offer and confirmed his plea to save his master's life by licking up grains of salt, from the blade of sword, according to Khasi customs. The date of his surrender was fixed on January 13, Tirot Singh was to come unarmed on that day.



So it was decided that the British personnel also were to come unarmed.

The tradition is inconsistent with what was told in the record. It recounts that the Britishers had hatched a trick to surprise Tirot Singh and take him prisoner. On that gloomy day, Inglis accompanied by his sepoy dressed as natives, came to an armistice with Tirot Singh on an appointed date, at Lum Sohmylleng near Um Shyllong in which an interpreter called upon him thus : "The British Deputies have now come to make peace with you and offer their hand of friendship". Then Tirot Singh came out with 30 bowmen and 6 musketeers. Coming before Inglis, Tirot Singh drew out his sword as a token of irrevocable pledge "that you have not conquered my country even if Bor Manik is not here". Inglis did the same. Tirot Singh thereupon on affirmation of the pledge, took an oath by licking up the blade of the sabre. Inglis followed suit and did likewise. Then one man raised an alarm and men accompanying Inglis, rushed at Tirot Singh and in a skirmish had him arrested.

The record suggests that Tirot Singh on January 13, 1833, actually appeared before H. Inglis and came accompanied by 30 bowmen and 11 musketeers. Tirot Singh had announced on January 9, 1833 that both parties to this historic interview were to come unarmed. Since he had come with a retinue of armed men, Inglis thereupon complained this breach of pledge upon which an influential adviser of Tirot pronounced, upon his conduct that his coming with a body of armed men, was symbolic of this hero's desire to impress upon his countrymen that he had not been captured as truly he had not been totally annihilated, but this behaviour was a pledge that he had come to tender his voluntary surrender as a king. The episode of Tirot Singh's capture remained to many of his contemporaries much cryptic as it were to our present generation since the records are themselves vague and not indicative. Inglis in act of confirmation swore to abide by this king's pledge by licking up grains of salt from the sabre. But Pamberton wrote that "Mr. Inglis to allay the suspicion of the

Rajah, at his request, repeated the ceremonial form of oath he had before taken."<sup>1</sup> What actually was the reading of this armistice was that Tirot Singh, the true martyr in the freedom struggle of the Khasis and Jainties, from the first to the last chapter of this glorious movement, was to be treated in full dignity as an Independent King and not a Semi-Independent or dependent sovereign. He had lived with this, he had cherished it, held it dear and proudly asserted it during his exile.

The record does not mention the name of his royal escort who appeared on this scene to witness the course of this conduct and gave him a send-off. The tradition could not also be doubted much with regard to its genuineness when we recollect that the British agents used these means of armistice, to arrest freedom fighters such as U Bor Manik in 1829 and perhaps U Muken and quell the movement. They used such means to trap them. The tradition is clear that Tirot Singh's capture was obtained during a truce specifically arranged and was not the result of his personal surrender. The tradition outlines the tactics of the Government and the expedient steps to overthrow their opponents besides using rigorous military operations. Many of the other contemporary Khasi leaders were vanquished in this manner and victories were not always the result of fair fights. On the strength of the tradition, most of the local modern writers did not accept that Tirot Singh came to announce his voluntary surrender but admitted that his capture was caused during a proposed interview with the officers.

With rejoicings from the Government side, Tirot was thus taken prisoner of war. It was impossible for other chieftains become to his rescue, although the tradition recounts that some local chiefs made efforts to save him. He was taken first to Mairang and then to Gauhati where he faced his trial bravely.

It was a bolt from the blue, loud mourning was heard at his sudden capture : the land of songs became the land of tears, the odious cloud set its doom.

Tried at the Gauhati court, he was sentenced to life imprison-

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<sup>1</sup> Pamberton, Eastern Frontier, p. 243.



ment to Dacca and was later on treated as political prisoner; he was entitled to a house, two servants and a monthly allowance of Rs. 63.

Bor Manik being away, the government grasped an opportunity to effect Tirot Singh's fall. However, during the journeys, he used to consult the omen about his friend's fate once he found a very bad sign. Bor Manik hurried back home, reached Shillong from where he learned that the Court of Gauhati had sentenced Tirot Singh to life imprisonment at Dacca. Tirot Singh had just been brought back to Shillong then to Sohra and then to Chatak, where he was due to be taken to his new destination. Bor Manik in great haste set out to Chatak to say goodbye to him. Luck was with Bor Manik when he found him boarded on a boat bound for Dacca. He rushed against the guards and embraced Tirot Singh. The tradition says that a few words slipped from his tongue when the guards pushed him ashore and then Bor Manik was also arrested or shot to death. Thus his end was also obscure. True friendship always pays well not only in strengthening one's life but in promoting some assets for social or political reconstruction. However true friendship as in the case of these two, appears to be rare in other annals of local or national freedom movement.

V. G. Bareh describes how U Tirot Singh before the hills passed out of his eyes, bade adieu to his motherland : "It breaks my heart to part from you. . . . . I do not know where these men will take me, but without you, my motherland, this life of mine will be an empty one, and my manhood will become only a shadow".<sup>1</sup>

Even with his deportation, it is said that the leaders at Nongkhlaw refused to have a successor as long as Tirot Singh was still alive. Instantaneously they pressed Lieutenant E. D. Townsend stationed at Mirang to recall Tirot Singh to govern Nongkhlaw, in an altogether different status and in accordance with the terms of the treaty proposed. The government on their behalf sent a message to Tirot Singh to be reinstated at Nongkhlaw. But

<sup>1</sup> V. G. Bareh, Drama U. Tirot Singh, p. 74.

he rejected replying thus : "I choose to die in this prison like a king rather than go back to my.....country and sit on the throne of Nongkhlaw like a slave."<sup>1</sup>

Tirot Singh at a time could never forget his home, the splendour of the hills and valleys and the large number of his companions and associates. "If I can only drink once again of the rock crystal fountains flowing through the rocks of Nongkhlaw, if again I can only breath the invigorating air..... perhaps life would become sweet again". Proudly asserting himself an independent King, time and again, he said : "The blood of my forefathers is still running in my withered veins and here I must stay till the end".

The tradition suggests that the story of the end of freedom struggle should not be taken to be true, so that further uprisings were renewed and so U Lorshon still rallied a small force. Up till Tirot Singh's death, it is not known what happened to Bor Manik and Jidor Sing. The government could not fill up a successor immediately as Rijon Singh was still minor 12 years old, and the headmen refused to have him as long as Tirot Singh was still alive.

In the course of time, the uprising became largely dis-organised because Bor Manik since Tirot Singh's capture, saw an end to this movement, whereas Lorshon, pressed on all sides by difficulties, came to tender his submission in September 1833 to Townsend at Nongkhlaw. But Lorshon submitted nine months after Tirot Singh's exile. U Ram Sing of Maharam was never fully satisfied in having taken up an engagement with the East India Company and this was the reason why a second movement and prolonged struggle was offered by U Sngap Raja of Maharam to the government up-till 1839.

Exhausted with constant exertion in a four year war, which had completely sapped his energy, Tirot Singh did not live long at Dacca. The end of this great leader soon came. One tradition says that he lived for one year more after he was captured and passed away during his early thirties. "Only a few moments

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<sup>1</sup> V. G. Bareh, Drama U. Tirot Singh.



more . . . . . then this soul of mine shall fly through the iron rods of this prison cell as a wild bird flies from its cage. I have reached the end of my journey, but before I cross to the borders of eternity, promise me Iangsingh, that you shall not forget to carry my bones home and lay them down to rest with the bones of my ancestors underneath the cromlechs at my kingdom". The Dacca tradition says that he died at a dispensary and was accorded treatment. A story suggests that a few kinsmen visited him before being taken ill and that his own son attended him for some days.

Tirot Singh must have constantly felt remorse when he looked back to the past of his life, his gallant deeds, the system of his alliances, his directions of military operation, his faithful counsellors as well as betrayers and the other dramatic episodes came crowded into his mind, but what he resented most was the treacherous role of the other personages from the beginning up-till the end of this unique movement which has now a place in the national freedom struggle. What impresses us most is that, this personage had not failed entirely at least in posing a challenge to the might of the British empire to four years' time in which, indeed, he succeeded in a great measure, and with the odds he was constantly faced and as such, he had lived, to point out a moral and adorn a tale. Perhaps his last wish was repeated in that he died treated with full dignity of the king.

Tirot Singh died during the first month of 1834. This was confirmed by Rijon Singh, his immediate successor who was installed to Nongkhlaw throne on March 29, 1834 who wrote thus to F. Jenkins Agent, Governor General: "The Assistant states that on the demise of Teerut Singh, Rajah, during the rule of Government that besides Myntrees it was with the consent of Sirdars, and the females of the Raj that I was nominated in March 1834 as his successor, this is not true, the fact is, I am the son of Chuttra Singh, Rajah's own sister<sup>1</sup> on his death. I being a minor, it was with the consent of Myntrees that Teerut

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<sup>1</sup> General Proceeding 25 Sept. 1855 Chuttra was Hindu pronunciation of U Konrai Singh Syiem.



Singh, the distantly connected nephew of Chuttra Singh was nominated during my minority. On his death, I being the actual heir of Chuttra Singh, and having attained my majority, I was nominated by the Government with the consent of the Myntries of the Guddee. I was not appointed by consent by the Sirdars and female members of the Rajghee". It is really resented that the actual date of Tirot Singh's death has not been obtained.<sup>1</sup> His death could, therefore, be placed around January 1834 and not later.

Many great personages suffered like Tirot Singh. His last days are comparable to Napoleon who, after he had given to Europe the reconstruction that it owed, he had yet to count on his last days like a vagabond in a solitary confinement, without any of his friends, without any of his relatives to see him breathe his last.

In 1971 I visited Mysore and was so much moved when I saw Tipu Sultan's centre and the spot where his dead body was found while engaging in a war. I was touched by the spirit of patriotism which dominated the great and stalwart personages who dedicated themselves to the cause of their motherland, to liberate her from servitude, the encroachments and exploitations of others. It was for the same degree of dedication that the freedom fighters of Meghalaya persisted in the struggle against the odds, the bullets and the starvation. It was for the same principle that Tipu Sultan and Rani of Jhansi too exerted themselves as the gallant patriots. But U-Duwan although a prophet was a contrast since he went to far to declare himself an enemy of Tirot Singh and he played his role like the Nizam of Hyderabad during Lord Wellesley's time.

Tirot was indeed an enhancing figure, a man of indefatigable industry, strenuous will power, indomitable mind, high principles, fired by the enthusiasm and vision to shed lustre to his land, save her prestige and revive her glory. His feats, his adventures, his exploits and accomplishments are inspiring and memorable.

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<sup>1</sup> I had tried to consult the records available at the National Archives, West Bengal State Archives, Assam Government Secretariat Record Room, etc., but did not succeed.



Through him, the Khasis made invaluable contributions to patriotism which is a gospel to every conscious citizens to love one's mother land over all things of secondary nature. It is in the fitness of the sacrifices of patriots that poet Longfellow says :

**“Lives of great men remind us  
We can make our life sublime;  
And leaving departing behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time”.**

And indeed patriots of such calibre fought the good fight of life to save their countrymen not only from political dismemberment but the moral ills, wrong and depravotion.

So passed away Tirot Singh, we do not get of course a clear idea of the way he died, the care attended to, his last wish and his dying words. He was denied the full cremation ceremony according to customs in which the State delegations from all over the kingdom would come amidst the drum-beats and dirges song and other celebration to give him their last salute. It was true that his successor in consultation with the eight Myntries should have performed his ceremony and his corpse exhausted in the fire, his charred bones should have been collected for interning them in a larger cromlech which contained the bones of his predecessors from the royal house. It is not known how a funeral ceremony was performed for this great hero, died away from his home and how his corpse was disposed off. May be he was buried or burned without any official ceremony being performed, without any of his relatives attending it, without drum-beats, without pipes and without dirges song, without a royal bier draped with colours which could be matching with his dignity. His funeral ceremony was performed silently and perhaps hurriedly. But his spirit outlives the wrecks of time since several memorials to perpetuate his hallowed memory were planned.

There were other thoughts about his death. In one of the memorial meetings held on March 29, 1978, it was proposed that as long as he lived, the movements in the hills still had their course which never failed to have this or that repercussion.

These circumstances led him not to live longer. Even up-till Rijon's succession, all was not well. On the other hand the movement continued until 1839, of course, confined now to Maharam.

Tirot still speaks to our generation to perform noble deeds for defending the honour of this ancient land. How we ever thought was his dying words? But he died an unconquered hero and Independent king and he saw himself fulfilling his mission "Better die a commoner in prison than a slave king on the throne". And perhaps Tirot Singh's slogan at his dying hour when the news of his death was brought home, became again the source of inspiration to the contemporary generation and deeply influenced the future movements headed by U Sngap and Jidor of Maharam, U Rajendra King and U Kiang Nongbah of Jaintia.



## Repercussion

TIROT SINGH'S DEEDS are memorable. Indeed he was an arbiter in the destiny of the region. With so dramatic a career he did not live long to see more changes which came on to stay.

As a consequence of the movement, the corollary that followed was the annexation of Jaintia which occurred in 1835. This in turn led to the outburst of the Jaintia movement, a memorable event on which occasion, U Kiang Nongbah and his partners stepped up and performed their tasks as the unforgotten heroes in a liberation war which occurred in 1860 to 1863. This liberation movement in fact is more remembered and leaves its impression upon the pages of history. The ground was prepared by U Rajendra, the deposed Jaintia king. We cannot forget that the Jaintia and the Nongkhlaw kings were close kinsman, in fact they were the two brothers tracing their origin from Ka Li Dohkha, their ancient mother.

The changes brought forth by the East India Company in many kingdoms, the engagements resulting therefrom with the British government and the relations determined on their basis, were the other effects of the movement. There are other stories of a sweeping social change. All these cannot escape themselves from the biography of U Tirot Singh, in fact they form the landmarks of historical retrospection.

### **The allies and their fate**

The East India Company followed consistently their policy to reward their allies and inflict penalties upon their adversaries.

Perhaps Tirot Singh had heard these news until he breathed his last. This filled him with remorse and indeed the story of his end was a tragedy. This sort of thing, however, cannot escape especially when we remember the life history of the heroes who made so much sacrifice for the cause of their land. It is clear that many had suffered and died and sustained heavy losses. But Tirot Singh did not fail to see that the movement he had launched would also be helpful to some extent especially in bringing about the acknowledgement of the states by the East India Company. Let us see now how the victims were meted out the penalties as the Englishmen thought them deserving. Many of them when quelled had to pay the heavy war indemnities. The imposition of fines upon the belligerent parties has been mentioned in some of the treaties. We find that the fines accruing from the defaulting states totalled to an amount of Rs. 22,851—9-0 (i).

Upon the four—Shella Wahdadars, U Mishmi (Mihsngi), U Bir Singh, U Sumer and U Ksan a fine of Rs. 4,000 was imposed for government expenditure incurred in despatching the troops to subdue the movement vide agreement drawn up on September 3, 1829. The amount was returned in four instalments to a total of Rs. 3,998 upto April 1834.

U Rem and U Phan, of Mokend poonjee were fined Rs. 100 on October 5, 1829 for having sheltered outlaws for which up-till April 1834, only Rs. 50 was delivered.

U Jibor and U Frey Kongor of Rambrai were fined Rs. 4,351-9-0 for incurring expenditure on the troops sent to their village as per agreement drawn up on October 21, 1829 : upto April 1834, only Rs. 400 was deposited.

Upon Bor Manik Raja of Khyrim, a fine of Rs. 5,000 in which Rs. 1,000 was paid while for the balance, the succeeding Rajah had agreed to complete the construction of a road as directed to him.

Pako Jhalook of Jyrngam was obliged to pay a fine of Rs. 2,000 for "having plundered the company's ryots of Dwar Bungong" by agreement executed on May 4, 1831. U Long of



Panbari was fined Rs. 1,000; Seemdo Rajah, nephew of Sheba Raja of Rungshu Rs. 1,000; Simto Sing and Jubur Sing Rajah of Mookut Rs. 2,200; U Roo Rajah of Boko Rs. 1,600; Yaroo Lyngdoh of Boko Rs. 150 and inhabitants of Rambrai Rs. 5,000. Poko Joolok had paid up Rs. 54-12-0; U Long had delivered up Rs. 8, and U Roo had deposited Rs. 276-8-0; Yaroo had managed to pay Rs. 15, and Rambrai inhabitants had settled with only Rs. 200 out of the total fines. All these fines were levied by Mr. Scott.

Mr. Cracraft in the years 1832 and 1833 had managed to impose fines upon the following incumbents as follows :

Inhabitants of Byrung for murdering company's subjects and not producing criminals through Suba Sing, Rajah of Cherra—on January 15, 1834, Rs. 200.

Inhabitants of Sohbar in the charge of Sumar Sing Giri for the same reason as above—on January 15, 1834.

Inhabitants of Mawlong through Purhut Sing Raja for the same reason as above—on January 15, 1834.

In lieu of payment in cash, in the case of Sohbar and Byrung, the construction of Muhades Stage huts was allowed to be taken by the incumbents concerned, whereas Mawlong managed to pay the fine.

Upon Dur Sing Kalah Rajah Nongstoin and U Kha Lyngshkor, a fine of Rs. 200 was imposed for having aided Jidor Sing by the agreement executed on August 14, 1832 by Mr. Robertson. The fine was duly paid.

The people of Sohbar, however, from time to time were suspected of conducting murders in the first instance on November 12, 1831 when two sepoy were killed at Aloocheduh between Pundua and Theriahghat and in another instance on December 29, 1831, when a servant of Major Watson was cut off on the Pundua—Sohra road. These murders were perpetrated at the same time, U Subha and U Monbhut with veterans from Mawdon and Shella attacked the government posts at Sylhet in 1831.



Sohbar thus was obliged to pay a fine of Rs. 100 at a time and Rs. 300 to be paid in perpetuity on these villages as punishment for an outrage perpetrated in 1839, besides which Sohbar was due to pay a fine in 1832 imposed by Cracraft and in which Jenkins followed up by demanding a yearly rent from these villages. Many of the Syiems were in arrears and could not clear up payment in time. When this matter was referred to Fort William, Calcutta, C. E. Trevelyan thus replied: "His Lordship in council thinks that the policy is very questionably of levying a money tax at all from the Hill tribes who are poor and entirely dependent upon the produce of the Hills which they barter in the plains. The decision to levy tax upon Sohbar and Mawlluh was to be reserved until the matter was smoothly settled. On matter relating to Rambrai's arrears, this case also needed re-assessment until the people shall return to their homes when the number of houses by which the tax is to be paid can be calculated."

Capt. Lister later on, suggested, however, that certain conditions should be relaxed on matter regarding payment of fines by defaulters. This was because "of the lands they held at the foot of them and the further loss they sustained at the same time by the burning of their villages by our troops and of having part of their fines remitted, and for the remainder he would recommend that the inhabitants may be allowed the option of paying either in labour or roads or if they preferred it, so much money annually to be assessed on each house until the whole has been liquidated".

The Secretariat from Fort William issued this directive: "No executive officer should take upon himself to impose a fine upon any Independent Chief or community . . . . . The fines when imposed should be strictly of a judicial character". Clemency appeared to have dictated British government decision in this connection, but it was also feared that such cases might have also more impact which might in course of time brew other troubles. In a few cases the British claims had been written off.

Exaction of an indemnity was the first strategy used by the



local British officers in their endeavour to subjugate Tirot Singh and his allies.

The next exercise measure was the creation of the British *Areas* of those villages wrested from those kingdoms which had fought with the Company, whereas in other cases, the government transferred some villages from the hold of their opponents to the friendly kings. Those villages which provided closest links with Tirot Singh, which attained more strategic positions and affording central positions to the belligerent were to be first victims reduced to British areas, placed under direct British administration, being bound also to return a house tax annually. Mawsmmai state *Nongthymmai—Maylong Syiem* ruled by Muken most probably was the first village to be reduced to a British area, an account of its position as gateway between the centred plateau and the south besides which it was a meeting place of the envoys from the north and south when earlier confederacies were formed to resist the Mughal invasion from Sylhet. Most of the first treaties were pledged with the English at Mawsmmai not Sohra. Muken faced a disastrous fate when he lost his hold over Mawsmmai followed by withdrawal of the seven kurs (Myntri clans) from Mawsmmai to Sohra where they were united with a Sohra royal family. What was worse was that Angajur Fahtipur in Sylhet belonging to Mawsmmai was now transferred to Sohra. Muken resented and therefore strengthened the offensive upon the Company for four years until he was trapped or pacified and sent on exile in 1832. His fall was similar to that of Tirot Singh both spent for the rest of their lives in exile.

Tirot Singh faced a similar fate. After the company reduced a portion on the south, they advanced to Mawmluh when both of Khyllup his uncle and vicegerent and himself offered a severe resistance but the English men having overcome, they made it first tributary but it was finally reduced to a British area about 1850. The British action hit Tirot Singh very much since he was attacked both from Bardwar and Mawmluh which afforded his royal house several resources. He suffered from the loss of Mawmluh because it was his second headquarters and some



say his home village. Iron-smelting was gradually being reduced to extinction since this event took place. Mr. Scott left Laitynsew its adjunct untouched which till today is included in Nongkhlaw.

David Scott likewise inflicted punishment on Bor Manik and deprived him of Laitlynkot and Laitkroh which had abundant iron-smelting and village industries on their neighbourhood when both were made British areas.

Sohbar since joined Tirot Singh had a severe penalty meted out having taken on outstanding part in this freedom struggle. However, she had been punished more than once. On October 15, 1834, F. Jenkins in this connection wrote "With regard to Soopar Poonjee Guilty (Sohbar) . . . . . I find that previously to our occupying posts in the hills, the community of Soopar Poonjee and allied villages had been guilty of atrocity on the people of Sylhet lowlands, the offenders were demanded of the Rajah of Jyntah, on whom the villages were the dependent, by the Magistrate of Zillat (Sylhet) and were delivered up, convicted and executed. On this occasion they transferred their allegiance to the Kyrim Rajah".<sup>1</sup> On September 29, 1829 Mr. Scott reported: "The allied villages were treated as conquests and placed by Mr. Scott under Somar Giri, the son of Dewan Sing Rajah of Cherra as of reward for the services of himself and father." Sohbar continued to be administered under Sohra's superveillance but after 20 years or so, it came to be administered through a Sirdar locally elected by its people.

The movement provided an antecedent to the East India Company during their regime to cause alternation in state boundaries, state successions and making new political arrangements. These changes were made based mostly on the whims or personal experience of the Agency officials than on fact finding or spot study by competent personnel of the supreme government. Jyngam, one of the Syiemships was reduced to a mere British area for reasons not known but the change seems to have occurred

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign Department Political Branch consultation, 30th Oct. 1834 No. 25/27.



as a consequence of her Syiem having joined the alliance. Several changes were to follow in quick succession which were to stay on effect adversely the states such as Nongpoh, Nongwah or Rani and others, the former reduced to a Sirdarship and the latter to a British Area, but the change was affected after a lapse of many years. But worse was the fate of Rani, the most beloved partner of David Scott, having played such role to strengthen British hold against the Khasis. The question is how was it that she was destined to lose her special status and be graded as British area after the lapse of 50 years or so since Lolit declared himself on the side of the Company.

We have mentioned how several tracts of lands in Lower Assam stretching from Rahan near Nowgong to Goalpara were lost to Assam's districts and how also part of lands located now in Bangladesh were handed over to Sylhet and Cachar Districts. This was because the English found in the Khasis their greatest rivals and in fact they were the stumbling block to the consolidation of the British administration in the erstwhile Khasi dominions.

### **Events in Contemporary Kingdoms**

We feel that Tirot Singh's biography will not become complete unless we examine the other repercussions in the then Khasi kingdoms. It is, therefore, necessary to deal with the important states where the movement left its impact and those changes it produced :

#### *Nongkhlaw*

Since Tirot Singh's exile, Nongkhlaw fell under the direct administration of the East India Company. In addition to the Agent to Governor General with his office at Sohra, E.D. Townshend, Civil incharge was posted at Mairang. Up-till Lorshon's surrender, the situation had gradually been improving. A large number of people returned back to their villages in which



arrangements for the rehabilitation were made. The country had suffered disastrous results; many villages having been deserted, lot of efforts were, therefore, to be made for the reconstruction of villages or resettlement of the evacuees returned from the jungles.

The issue of succession was to be settled soon shortly after Tirot Singh was deported. The government had to consult the Myntris and others concerned with regard to a legitimate successor. There were claimants such as Jidor, Rijon Singh in addition to Tirot Singh's nephew. The matter was kept in abeyance until Tirot Singh's death as a token of deep respect to him.

After Tirot Singh's death which occurred in January or February 1834, the Myntris as legitimate electors, chose Rijon Singh as legitimate heir to Tirot Singh, on the grounds that he was Konrai's own nephew, a legitimate successor in 1826, but as at that time, he was minor, Tirot Singh was appointed until such time, Rijon was capable of carrying out this task. Rijon was then 13 years of age (in 1834). All the eight Myntris just confirmed the resolution carried over in 1826 since the question of fresh election did not arise. Rijon also did not join the movements launched by his distant cousin and thus was more preferred to any other claimant. The record says: "He has been acquainted the unusual accomplishment to a Cossiah prince of being able to write and read in Bengali with some degree of fluency." The investiture was attended by Capt. F. Jenkins Agent and Lt. H. Inglis to assist him in the ceremony, Rijon received investiture on March 29, 1834.

The accession notes were prepared both in Bengali and English, signed by Rijon Sing and Jenkins as the high contracting parties to the new Treaty executed by them. The treaty secured the right of the government to construct roads and to raise necessary quarters at any place in the State. All cases deserving capital punishment were to be referred to the government for final settlement, whereas other judicial cases were to be adjudicated by the Syiem with his ministers: that both should attend to such needs to be requisitioned by government in res-



pect of making provisions for labourers and building materials in construction works, labourers and other particulars : that both should provide grazing lands to cattle to be handed over by the government for their care and maintenance : under a provision of this treaty, Rijon Singh, during the first one year after his accession, should be entitled to a monthly pension of Rs. 30/- but this provision should lapse after the term was over. The preamble reads : "Whereas the Hon'ble company have been pleased to appoint me, Runjun (Rujjom) Singh, inhabitant of Nuckna (Nungkhlaio) as Raja of the territories of the former Raja Tirot Singh, I, of my own accord, enter into the following agreement, and I bind myself not to act in contravention thereof, and that my Ministers also shall act in conformity thereto". Rijon further agreed to subject himself to payment of such fines as shall be imposed upon him.

Rijon, however, proved an opposite of Tirot Singh, for besides accepting foreign regime, he miserably failed to run the administration efficiently and consistently, spending much of his time in staying at Gauhati. Later on he fell to distress by leading an extravagant life,<sup>1</sup> under the "baneful influence of some Bengalee mookhtears". Under these circumstances he became totally impoverished, and, therefore, in 1848, was compelled to hand over his office to Jidor Singh, who was no legitimate successor, but a shrewd and intelligent person. Even with these provisions, he had miserably failed and was running pecuniary difficulties. He took to dissolute habits of drunkenness and thus spoiled his own career. The successors were incomparable with Tirot Singh. Tirot Singh was perhaps conceiving these drastic changes and his replacement by these worst persons. About the restoration of Bardwar, F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General wrote thus :

"I propose, it is practicable to allow a Nungklow Raj a district in the plains in farm. This was contemplated by my predecessor and I trust it will be the means of attaching steadily to our interests.....the restoration of some land below will be a very

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign Department Political consultation 22 May 1834, No. 78.



acceptable measure and almost necessary for the Rajah's support"<sup>1</sup> dt. Gowahatty, (Gauhati) April 22, 1834. Besides Bardwar, Bogayyee was made over also to Rijon. Thus Rijon was known as Rajah of Nongkhlaw and Bardwar.

### *Shillong*

The tradition strongly ascribes that Bor Manik just before Tirot Singh's collapse had been outside these Hills in search of help. Thus U Rabon Singh, Rajah of Khyrim opined that "the districts of Myllem and Khyrim, were formerly one state under the control of his grand uncle, Bur Manik Rajah who was obliged to flee from the country in consequence of some disagreements with the British Government, during the rebellion of the Khasis, leaving it in charge of his nephew the late Singh Manik, who contrived to keep possession of it by remaining netural in those troubled times." F. Jenkins after Tirot Singh's death stated that "Mulleem already returned to the jurisdiction of Bur Manik . . . . . whether voluntarily or how the Rajah reasserted control but I consider that the inhabitants have no objection to the authority exercised by the Rajah and I would beg to recommend out this village and the lands south of the river Omeyang should be restored to the Rajah." Bor Manik's fate was never known definitely. The tradition plainly suggests that he abdicated in favour of Chand Manik (Sain Manick) and his abdication appears to have taken place close to the date of Mr. Scott's demise. Rabon Singh, successor to Khyrim Singh Manik, also admitted that he fled from the country Sain Manik was addressed as Rajah of Myllem 1835.

On March 28, 1834 Chand Manik executed a treaty thus : "I, Chand Manika, do hereby enter into this agreement on behalf of Burro Manik, Rajah of Mooleem . . . . , to the effect that a fine imposed upon my maternal uncle, Burro Manik, not having paid up to this day, I who am his nephew and shall, therefore, be the Rajah of the Said Mooleem Poonjee, agree to pay Rs.

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<sup>1</sup> Political Proceedings 24 & 25 July, 1836 No. 584, No. 88 cd.



1,000 out of the above sum to Capt. Townshend at Cherra Poonjee within ten days and that with the remaining Rs. 4,000 I will construct a durable road from Moleem . . . . . to Cherra Poonjee, leading to Myrung. Fit for easy passage of horses, those places which are bad and unfit for the road being repaired and levelled by the Company's people.

"That as soon as the road is complete I will send notice to the hazzoor who will send a man to examine it, and should the road be approved of, a receipt for the above sum of Rs. 4,000 will be granted to me by your Honour." It was a strange coincidence that this treaty of alliance was executed on March 28, 1834 which was similar to that signed by Rijon at his investiture on the next day, the March 29, 1834.

### *Rambrai*

U Jibor Singh on October 17, 1829 agreed in a treaty that whatever expenditure had been incurred by the government "in invading and taking possession of my country . . . . . the same I shall without any objection realise my Hill ryots and pay". We have mentioned since this treaty was executed, all the territory in the plains had been wrested from this state and annexed to the government. On October 21, 1829, Jibor Singh was fined Rs. 4,351-9-0 by David Scott to meet the cost of expedition launched against the state<sup>1</sup>. Heavier terms were exacted during the subsequent movement when this state under Lorshon, who had killed his brother, Jibor, perpetrated raids on the Dwars in consequence of which a fine of Rs. 5,000 was imposed upon the people of Rambrai on May 4, 1831. After peace was restored, the government managed to exact an annual house tax of Re. 1/- per house from U Wan Sirdar of Sajur upon his four villages U Na Sirdar of Khuidas upon his two villages, U Kiang Lyngdoh of Nongkhlalang in the engagements executed in 1833, on the grounds, that in all probability, these headmen had been instrumental in affecting a raid with Lorshon in the plains. Besides,

<sup>1</sup> For. Department Political Branch consultation 11 February 1835 No. 94.

U Ma Minister, promised to deliver 200 mounds of paddy to be collected from each house to a Subedar posted near Rambrai. On January 21, 1835, U Wan Sirdar, U Kiang, U Man Sirdar, Ocnoya Sirdar, executed a treaty before Capt. Lister in which they pledged that they acknowledged protection of the East India Company and tender their dependence to their authorities : that they subjected themselves to any investigation as would be made by the authorities concerned into the murder cases and not to adjudicate cases of capital punishment without consulting them : that they would render all possible assistance to the company as and when they were to be engaged against their enemy. The debt of Rs. 8485-13-0 accruing from fines was to be settled by paying the annual amount of Rs. 200/- and depositing the same as shall be directed.

The next Syiem reinstated after some time was U Amur.

On the other hand, the condition was normal in the other states such as Mawsynram, Myriaw, Mawlai or Malai Sohmat, Nongsohphoh, Bhowal, Nongpoh, Jyrngam or Jirang, and other Syiemships.

The treaties reinstated the position of Syiems as Allies of the British crown as on the terms and conditions of the Subsidiary Alliance. The States that had Independent status were : Sohra (now known Cherra) Khyrim, Nongstoin, Nongspung and Langrin. The other Lyngdohships which adjusted themselves naturally to British relations were Mawphlang and Sohiong. With the Independent States, the treaty conducted was only with Cherra on September 10, 1829 in which Duwan Sing Rajah agreed to enter British protection. The treaty reads :

“We in conjunction with those who reside and trade in our territory, shall continue to conduct the business of our territories, keeping the ryots contented, in conformity to the former rules and concerns. The country will have no concern with any to the Governments, but should any person who has committed any deed come to our country we shall, on demand, seize him forthwith and send him back.



“Should any dispute arise with the Rajahs of any other country, and if be considered fit to be investigated, we shall accept and submit to the judgement given by the Government and without the consent or permission of the Government, we shall not rouse any dispute with the Rajah of any other country.

“Should any battle take place with Government on any hill, we shall immediately proceed with our troops and render assistance to the Government.”

Mr. David Scott, Agent to the Governor General, promises that “should you act according to the aforesaid conditions, your territories will be protected in the proper manner on the part of the Government, and should you have any dispute with the Rajahs of other countries, the same will be decided and assistance will be given to you in every manner. On these terms, this *ekrar* is conducted on both sides”.

(From translation)

R. E. Twidale

With Sing Manik, Rajah of Khyrim, Soonder Singh, Rajah of Langrin, U Meet, Rajah of Nongstoin, Dhur Singh, Rajah of Nongspung : “No treaties or agreements have been entered with these chieftains. They dispose off all civil and criminal cases occurring amongst their own ryots in their respective jurisdictions. When clashing with subjects of the British Government or those of other chiefs, the cases are taken up by the Cherra Courts and disposed off according to their merits”. As such, their complete judicial Independence was preserved except in those issues which concerned extraterritorial rights.

The treaties were renewed from time to time with the successors in each state. The renewal of the treaty in each case of succession, raised a vital question of constitutional priority. Thus Rabon Sing of Khyrim, who succeeded Sing Manik argued thus : “I was elected by the Myntries, Sirdars and elders to succeed in the Raj of my grand uncle (in the female line) the late Rajah Sing Manik of Nongkrem in the *elaka* of Khyrim, who breathed his last on 25th of Assin 1266 B.S. On my representating the

matter to you by petition, soliciting the grant of a *sanad* by petition, soliciting a *nazzar* of Rs. 500, I was instructed to furnish an agreement composed by you, and delivered over to me by execution. I freely agree to furnish it to the Government. I regret to find the last two paragraphs that I am compelled, as stated in the 7th Paragraph, to give a perpetual lease of all the waste lands and mineral beds in my country to Government without defining the boundaries, which arrangements forfeit me all the rights and possessions of my wastelands and mineral products which are known and will hereafter be discovered in my *elaka*.

“Agreeable to the statement entered in the 8th paragraphs I am to submit all cases of homicide, suicide and accidental death occurred in my country at Cherrapunjee, which is quite against the former customs of my country and to agreement furnished by my predecessors.

“It will be difficult on my part under such agreement to keep command amongst Myntries, Sirdars and the Elders of my territory and to bring them up to my opinion, consequently I will not be able to keep up peace among them as a condition set in the second paragraph of the agreement above referred to.

“My predecessor, the late Rajah Sing Manick, was authorised to settle and decide cases of every description on his own responsibilities without giving any cause for annoyance to the Government Local authorities. I may also be permitted to act accordingly in the occurrence of petty cases, and on the occurrence of homicide, suicide and accidental death, I may be allowed to investigate and decide them in an open Durbar with the assistance of my respectable Government ministering officers Muntries, Sirdars and the Elders of my country according to the ancient usages and punish the culprits in my territory. . . . . The chieftains of Cherra, Lungree, Nusting and Khyrim, have all been authorised to decide cases of all description occurred in their respective *elakas* at their own responsibilities, but I am at a loss to think why such agreements as proposed in the last two paragraphs have been also demanded from me when I did never act



in any way against the wish of the Government. Under all these circumstances, I respectfully annex herewith modified translation of the last two paragraphs of the *Ikrarname* made over to me for your consideration and confirmation, praying at the same time for the grants of a *sanad* already applied for on receipts of a *nazzar* agreed to. Should it not meet for your approbation, I shall have no objection to furnish an *ikrarnama* on the terms and conditions as was executed by Ram Singh Rajah of Cherrapunjee. In view of your most approving the above, I have every reason to hope that you will be kind enough to transmitting application through proper channel to the Supreme Government for consideration and Orders”.

## Rise of an Illustrious Hero, Raja U. Sngap Syiem of Maharam

MAHARAM OR MARAM made a closest liaison with Nongkhlaw during the war.

The inhabitants were renowned for their deeds. Maharam of course was one of the last kingdoms which came out to profess allegiance to the Company. It was recorded that Ram Singh Raja and one of his in-laws, U Ram Basan (Singtoo, Ranne's husband) executed a treaty at Choomtola on November 21, 1832 in the presence of Lt. H. Inglis. However, until Tirot Singh's downfall, the Maharam and Nongkhlaw warriors were keeping frequent communications and in fact, those people helped a lot the Nongkhlaw inhabitants in reaching them several provisions. Ram Singh resented the cessation of hostilities being forced so by the circumstances. The tradition tells us that the plain men (citizens) of the kingdom, were loyal to their kings during the war waged both by U Tirot and U Sngap. The plain sector of his kingdom extending to near Sunamganj appears to have been proposed by the Sylhet Collectorate to be attached to the Company's administration. The citizens, however, wanted to remain under their old Rajas. There were many Garos who were loyal to them.

One of the famous rulers was Queen Ka Wan called Ranee by people in the Plain who proved herself a statesman, who had enabled her kingdom to extend farther. She was loved by her own people and by others in the neighbouring kingdoms. She made trade and industry to progress on and established Ranikor



as the Second Headquarters besides Jakrem the main capital in the hills. Some traditions say that she reigned after U Sngap the hero but others say, and in all probability it appears, that she preceded him. Normally the Khasis never like uptill date to place a woman as their Syiem Synshar. But the circumstances as might have been caused by the scarcity of males, either because they were being yet infants or because of the refusal of legitimate successors to succeed to the throne, then the kingdom would not mind having a woman to act as a Syiem. Sometimes because of the persistent quarrel which could lead to disasters something like partition of the kingdom, the citizens then would like to crown a female personage as their Syiem, Raja U Sngap who appeared to be the descendant of this great and charming woman, now assumed the title of the second of the greatest Khasi freedom fighters in the same way as U Bor Manik, U Lorshon, U Muken, U Luk or U Suk (Wahlong) are now hailed as the Saviours.

I have tried to see to the authenticity of this famous Queen's reign, during my recent visits to Maharam, and on consulting the best informers known, we find that queen Wan, beyond doubt was a historical figure as Syiem Synshar or Syiem Longsyiem (defacto).

We have not heard much about the fate of U Ram Singh, whether he died or discontinued since after he executed a treaty with the English, the kingdom was in a state of warfare with Nongstoin. It appears that U Sngap stepped up to the position of a king and it seems certain also that the Kingdom lent solid support when he made known his plan to continue struggle with the British because the people also were angry on the conduct of the local officers who seized the revenue from the plain sector. In my personal capacity, I have tried to perpetuate his memory by causing an article of U Sngap Syiem in the *Assam Tribune* and staging a drama at Shillong with the help of the Khasi Cultural Society in 1975. The Khasi Cultural Society has produced a set of transparency slides on the freedom struggle launched by him against the commentary and musical background

relayed from the tape recorder. Queen Wan's role in forming a confederacy with the sovereigns of other states has been presented in a movie film entitled 'KA SYNJUK RI KI LAIPHEW SYIEM—1780-1810 A.D.' (The alliance of thirty kings) of 1½ (one and a half) hours duration originally shot in 16 mm then blown up to 35 mm and an appropriate censorship is obtained. Recently the people of Maharm state erected a memorial to perpetuate the memory of Rajah U Sngap Singh Syiem.

U Sngap according to the information collected two years ago at Mawkyrwat, the present state headquarters, was of stalwart physique. He was very tall, muscular and of immense prowess. Except on a few occasions, he was well dressed in full costume of his royal dignity. He wore a turban or cap, a waist-coat, a kilt or loin-cloth which he used on ordinary occasions. He wore constantly a necklace which was the only symbol of his Kingly authority. Sometimes he used to wear cane leggings and a pair of sandals like those of the Muslims. The tradition suggests that he had a great appetite for food and was very fast in movement. He was quick-witted, intelligent and was not talkative. U Sngap, therefore, succeeded Lorshon as freedom fighter and waged the second war of independence. Maharam never wished to be bound by a treaty stipulated in 1832. The tradition says that Maharam waged a ten-year long war which started in 1829 and ended in 1839. But since Tirot Singh's fall, U Sngap carried out the movement alone without the backing up of any kingly alliance, as in the case of the former.

The causes of the Anglo-Maram prolonged war are not clear. The record suggests of Nongstoin Maharam hostilities. According to it, E.D. Townshend, civil in-charge of Mairang, reported on June 27, 1834 that 100 men under Phanwun of Maharam attacked the village of Saphoo within the jurisdiction of Nongstoin, the same Phanwun having murdered the Nongstoin Rajah's brother, four years ago. The Nongstoin Rajah therefore, appealed to government for intervention, but since the issue was kept pending, the said Syiem, therefore, asked for "permission to open hostilities with the persons of Myaram. . . . with



whom he is at enmity". Since this reminder was received, Townshend was directed to summon the people of Myaram. "The relative evidence should be taken in your presence before a panchayat of Kossiah Sirdars who should give their opinion on the criminality of the accused agreeable to their customs. If, however, they would fail, a suitable fine was to be imposed upon the whole community and a more explicit treaty was to be concluded with the Kolah' Rajah."<sup>1</sup> It appears that the British siding with Nongstoin as a dependent state in this matter, and the measures adopted to coerce Maharam was one of the reasons which led to this war. But in tracing the other causes, we find that the people of Maharam took to fighting because the government had confiscated the plain territories of Maharam located in modern Bangladesh.

Maram (presently known as Maharam) lies southward of Nongkhlaw. Seventy village chiefs at Maram elect their Rajah seven of whom serve as Myntris. The two legitimate royal families also supply the reigning Syiem and are known as Syiemong (Kalah) and Syiemlieh (Dhollah). From either of the two houses the Syiem and the Deputy Syiem were elected by the village chiefs considered as spokesmen of the people.

The Kingdom comprised three portions Rilum (Upper range) Ri War (Lower range) and plains (with Puran, Saspur, Kadir, Konah and Chanduk) now included in Bangladesh. Jakrem in the upper range was the ancient capital. After Tirot Singh's fall the British Government levied taxes on the inhabitants in the plain area (Kodir, Konah, Chanduk and Puran Saspur) located on the Sylhet side. U Sngap resented such enforcement. This led to a long war. Both the local traditions and records mention this was as an important event in India's north-eastern history.

In a skirmish with the Maram Khasis, Colonel Lister, Political Agent at Cherrapunjee in 1836, was wounded. It was a second wound, 'the first wound being incurred against the same Khasis in 1829.' It was in 1829, that Lister, then Captain, was hit by an arrow. These disturbances still continued because in

<sup>1</sup> Foreign Department of Political consultation 4 Sept., 1834 No. 56.



April-May 1838, the Governor General-in-Council insisted on the local government to furnish relevant information with regard to the origin of such disturbances. On March 9, 1838 occurred a skirmish with a detachment of the Sylhet Light Infantry commanded by Captain W. J. Bennet, in which the party was caught amidst showers of arrows. On another occasion, Bennet sent a dobasia (interpreter) to announce upon the warriors to come out and lay down their weapons, but he received a rude reply the warriors having asked him to send out the troops to take them out from there. In 1839, a British government record says that although several villages Sirdars had been won over, 'still several atrocious murders were perpetrated by the inhabitants on the persons of our sepoy's and others passing through that part of the hills.' The political Agent had taken stern measures to reduce them by creating offensive ports, suspending trade and restricting cultivation.

The Khasis were able to sustain the defence of the upper ranges including the villages of Jakrem, Rangthong, Marshilong for some time but with the coming of a stronger force, they concentrated themselves at Nongnah, one of the beauty spots in the Khasi hills, and operated from the impregnable stockades on the precipitous heights of Nongkdait, Thiep Bamon and Mawtajem defeating and keeping out the several expeditions approaching Nongnah from Balat side. At Rangthong several soldiers and sepoy's fell down dead where marks of their graveyard are still pointed. Besides, U Sngap Rajah, the other figures were Moit Kliaw, Tep Shiak and Phan Maram. They produced a few firelocks and guns and employed an effective intelligence system. The Khasis operated by casting down heavy rock upon the battalions and shooting at with arrows and gun-shots. The tradition points out to strongholds and stockades erected on the hills, use of panjies, and the various means of guerrilla they employed to change the scenes and to check the advent of the troops into their mountain fastners. They made use of many devious paths serious parts to maintain communications and obtain supplies. Some village were burnt and the villagers shifted themselves to



the caves not only in Maharam but in her close neighbourhood where they made dwellings. Though the other kings kept silent and retired themselves from the wars waged by this state, yet several volunteers from Mawiang, Mairang—Nonkhlaw, Bhowal, Mawsynram and elsewhere came to assist the warriors. They helped Maharam in causing war fronts, direction of defensive and offensive strategies and laying ambushes. The Kinsmen and cousins having close blood ties came to join Maharam in her great task of liberation. Among the other kings and princes, U Sngap refused to be bound by the government and he waged this independence war. U Sngap refused to abide by other people's decision. He continued the struggle from his hide-out on the fastness for at least five years and kept the English men bewildered and single-handed he fought.

The British government had failed in this open warfare and managed to catch someone to act as arbitrator on their behalf. Captain Lister himself with his vast experience was at a loss to deal with this insurgency which seemed to have some mystery in it. The government later on got the help of the Myllem Syiem to open negotiations with Maharam.

In the story of the freedom struggle, the role of the traitors is always there for, the tradition has it that U Sngap during the last phase of his fighting, was confined at Nongnah located on the top of a deep precipice, access to it through cliffs and ridges being rendered difficult even for soliders of extra-ordinary calibre, this village remained shut being secured by three gates two of which were shut both day and night and only one used to keep communication with the outside world. A traitor, a story recounts at the dead of night took a company of soldiers to Nongnah and after climbing up, reached Nongnah and entered the inhabitation through that gate. They took to surprise the local population but U Sngap, his family and a few Myntris had managed to escape to Raibah. The story on the defeat of Sparta during Greeco-Troy war seem to have repeated here that this story is similar to that of king Xerxes of Persia who was able to inflict defeat upon the Greeks through the help of the local informers.

The story also tells us that one boy at mid-night crept stealthily to one military tent and bursted out a twin stone with a view to producing fire to make the tent gutted. He committed mistake in producing so much sound for it gave alarm to the soldier who immediately got out and killed him. The story of the valiant boy is also still told.

As an outcome of this persistent struggle for supremacy, Maram State lost a large territory in the plain, but the government, when the movement was quelled, took cautious attitude to retain the State. The brave Syiems fought to preserve their freedom. They were afraid of disastrous results that would come along with the new regime. *Ka riat pynhap briew* on the precipitous steep approaching Nongnah is called after this story and how batches of soldiers on several occasions were thrown out into the precipice by the guerrilla operators. U Sngap was captured at Raibah after Nongnah had fallen down. The tradition as we have suggested recounts that they were defeated not through fair fight but through the betrayal of a party, who went to the length of pointing out an approach path to Nongnah after being richly rewarded.

U Sngap embittered by the annexation of a large plain tract, located near Sunamganj, thereupon took to the fighting alone without help or alliance on as grand a scale as was that of U Tirot Singh. Glorious were the roles of U Moit Khaw, U Tep Shaik, U Phan Maram and U Yrja in the gallant defence of the stockades which held out themselves for so many years at the villages of Mawpud, Nongnah, Rangthong and Ngunra. Among the women, mention may be made of a patriotic woman, Ka-Lar Nongsyn-tiat who handled intelligence with great tact. On account of this and other factors, the war became prolonged.

On the occasion U Sngap declared war. He said thus: 'The war is inevitable. We shall fight to keep our sovereign satus intact. It is clear that our enemy shall snatch away our markets and trade and deprive us of our dominion. But I am determined with our queen and Myntris together to fight to the last.' An orator thus replied: 'We shall fight to protect our lands and keep our moral sense intact: to keep our women's sense of de-



gency and build up our own resources. We shall stand on our own legs. We shall not allow social exploitation to play foul game or havoc'.

Although the war was so prolonged, it is a paradox that most of the records are silent on the important events. Most of what we know come from the lips of our friends and informers. The tradition of its simple mode gives very important glimpses to certain events. It is true at Maharam both young and old still recall his deeds. The tradition lays stress on U Sngap being brought to terms after a good deal of negotiations was made with the government. This operation was confined strictly never to Maharam alone but to the neighbouring states as well and on the highways leading to important markets. With lightning speed the warriors shifted their operation from one place to another and caused confusion to the troops lying in wait.

The absence of any archivist source to keep things more known is also conspicuous. Lister although settled at the government headquarters at Cherrapunji ever after his retirement and (as some say) married to a local lady did not leave any diary to record these occurrences. A person like A. White serving as diarist on late Mr. Scott was no longer available. But what the tradition has preserved of this event is amply corroborated as we shall see. The liberation war had dragged on from 1829 to 1839 as initiated by Tirot Singh but in fact it was started in 1828 by Bor Manik. The circumstances compel us to link up Bor Manik, Tirot and Sngap as the trio in the annals of the Khasi freedom struggle. It was, however, Bor Manik's successor who conducted several negotiations to bring an end to this turmoil.

Sain or Chand Manik of Myllem is said to have sought recourse to arbitrate among the Englishmen on one side and Raja U Sngap on the other. Both the Myllem and the Maram traditions also give us to know that the Rajah Bahadur Sain Manik of Myllem made an utmost effort to initiate such negotiations and that he took pain at the conclusion of terms to help the Maram Syiem pay an indemnity to the Company. Thus at one interview

U Sngap addressed his adversary as follows : "Who launched first the trouble ? Is it not the Sahibs who encroached upon our plain areas and confiscated our revenue ? Is it just to allege that we perpetrated any raids upon their dominion and then returned home with a booty ? if our right were intruded, was it not reasonable that we had to protect them ?" It appears that several meetings were arranged amongst them since the Myllem Rajah had taken special responsibility to explore all possible means to reach a solution.

When the news of the fall of Nongnah an impregnable stockade which stood out for so long was brought, Sngap thus replied —"so the end has come. A number of my comrades have fallen. I call upon the villages of Raibah, Kyniong, Mawpud, Jakrem and Rangthong who have sustained for so long, who have produced such gallant men. I too choose to die rather than live as a slave".

When at the final armistice, Colonel Lister insisted on Sngap to deliver a tribute to meet the cost of British expedition, he replied as follows :

"I have no tribute to render. You know we too were quite exhausted. You have burnt our villages, killed our cattle, confiscated our paddy and made our people starve. Moreover, I was not able to collect revenue for so long."

The final terms, however, were imposed after Lister's guarantee the Rajah's life and personal liberty, assured, that an amnesty be offered to his followers, and that the troops, temporarily stationed be afterwards withdrawn. A hostage, a close relative of the Rajah was to be taken to be stationed under the Political Agent's supervision at Sohra but later on, it was decided that he would reside with the Rajah of Myllem instead of being detained at Sohra. The prisoners guilty of taking up arms and detained at Sohra, would be released but those concerned in the murders, would be detained, for the present until the inhabitants of the country should have resumed their peaceful habits and occupations ? It was the Myllem Rajah who played vital role in evolving a finally agreed conclusion and also helped in



arranging resettlements and collecting the tribute, the tradition which still persists.

The hostage Soolung Rajah before leaving for Myllem as hostage in company with the Myllem Rajah, made the following benediction : "Farewell my home; farewell this ancient kingdom, thy prestige and glory are gone. I have poured out my life to save thee but I am now defeated. Oh! God, to You I appeal to kindly save her from destruction and guard her people from doing wrong to blemish her".

The attendant who gave a send-off said : "Goodbye uncle Soolung but before departing we pray that many more persons like you be born and brought up from this ancient land, who would dedicate themselves to the righteous cause and thereby shed lustre to our country and enable a new kingdom to be made with growing strength".

A.J.M. Mills tells us in his *Report of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills* 1853 that the second treaty was concluded on February 12, 1839 or 3rd Falgoon, 1246 B. S. between U Songaph Rajah and the Political Agent to the Governor General. The clauses are as follows :

"That having acknowledged my dependency on the Company.....I agree to administer justice to my subjects as usual, but not to pass sentence of death upon any of them.

"That whenever a body of the Company's troops passes through my country, I will attend to them, and supply them provisions and other necessities, and receive the price thereof from the Company in the usual course.

"That whenever I am required by the Sahibs to appear before them on account of any disturbances in the hills, I shall do so with my Khasi people and shall attend as long as I may be desired to be present during which time only the provisions of my people will be charged in the Company.

"That if any person committing murder or dacoity conceals himself within my country, I bind myself and deliver him to the Sahibs when ordered to do so.

“That within one month from this date I will pay to the Company a fine of Rs. 2,000.

“That Chand Manik Rajah and Burro Manik Rajah of Moleem (Mylliem) Poonjee will stand security for the due fulfilment of the above conditions and that I give (sister's son) nephew Soolung Rajah of Moleem Poonjee in order to execute all orders passed with reference to my country. On these conditions, I execute this Deed of Agreement dated 13, February 1839”.

On the preamble, the Rajah declared to have wantonly fought against the government in which a number of men were lost. He offered to deliver the indemnity imposed to meet the expenditure incurred by government. The end of the movement is recorded with U Sngap's acceptance of this treaty.



## Jaintia Freedom Struggle

THE NEWS OF Tirot Singh's rising in arms reached all nooks and corners of the land. The Pnars, Syntiangs or Jaintias settled in Khasi Hills at Sohbar, Umniuh, Nongjri, Khadar Blang, Bhoi gave a good response. Messengers reached the Daloiships in Jaintia to solicit assistance and many patriots took it a common cause and hence joined the insurrectionists. Jaintia prophets since the time of Burmese invasion had predicted that the coming of the *phrengi* (British) regime, would soon be fulfilled and kingdoms thitherto independent would soon share the same fate with Assam and Sylhet. Rajendra, his chief Minister, the Ministers and the Dalois were watching these events with concern and apprehension. He had since 1830 clashed with the Sylhet Collectorate and the Sohra Agency on matters of some policies. In fact Jaintia was drawn into a series of freedom struggle from 1826 to 1833 as we shall see.

The relations on Rajendra's accession when he succeeded Ram Singh in 1832 were getting more and more unpleasant with the government. The relations were foiled in 1832 by an incident which occurred and which was conveyed in a letter addressed to U Ram Singh which extract runs as follows : "In the year 1832 two British subjects were passing along the high road in Assam when they were suddenly seized and carried up into the hills in the neighbourhood of Gobha, in your territory, and after having been decked out with new clothes and jewels, they were led away to be sacrificed together with two other persons also subjects to the government. One of the indivi-

duals succeeded in making his escape and on his return to the plains, he gave information of what occurred and as his statement was corroborated with many collateral circumstances, there was no reason whatever to doubt the truth of what he said. The other three individuals as they have never since been heard of.”<sup>1</sup>

The Jaintia king, it was true, performed human sacrifices at the shrine of the Hindu Kali goddess at Jaintiapur and for fulfilling it, used to kidnap unknown travellers to be made victims to such sacrifices. The Governor General had already warned the Jaintia king and in particular insisted to produce the person accused of this crime. This matter dragged on since the Jaintia court was never able to send an appropriate reply and produce the guilty person not until 1835, the date of annexation of Jaintia.

Besides, there were other factors that brought about other strained relations. The East India Company in 1832 observed that Jaintia in exchange of protection, conferred upon this kingdom, ought therefore to have complied with such terms to be imposed upon her, and deliver a tribute of Rs. 10,000 in recognition of the British paramount power. Rajendra complained of the government's wrong move in demanding a tribute as such provision had not been mentioned in an original treaty executed with his uncle, Ram Singh. He argued that his people would never consent to such a tribute as he was not entitled to levy taxes from them and all the revenue he could collect was from his plain dominions was used for his establishment. Moreover, the boundary dispute in modern Lower Assam made matters worse. “About the Rajah's possessions of Doomreya . . . . . they have been held for a very long period”. H Inglis also reported that “the Raja showed me an article of the treaty signed by Scott agreeing to give him a tract of country, in Assam when we got possession of it”.<sup>2</sup> The above report shows also Rajendra's complaints of certain conditions were never fulfilled by government but at the height of these unsettled things, the

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<sup>1</sup> 10(b) 1835 Volume of letters received from government, p. 93-101.

<sup>2</sup> Foreign 1834 Department Political Consultation 10 July No. 208.



government had imposed a tribute as the succession of a new king would have led to a renewal of a treaty which should contain this additional clause.

Rajendra's life like Tirot was doomed by newly rapid development. He lived in an unhappy period being encircled by new social forces to which he was put. Since the first movement had broken down, Rajendra could hardly find out means to fight with the British might. The circumstances were so unfavourable that finally he had to relinquish his dominion in 1835 and later on had to live in exile until his death in 1862. He was suspected to have secretly connived at with the freedom fighters from Chittagong during the first war of Independence of 1857.

Let us examine other causes of Anglo-Jaintia relations which subsequently became more and more strained. To add to the boundary dispute, the location of one Chokey Ghat at Chapermukh in Nowgong by Ram Singh which was within his jurisdiction, was objected to by the government who also had raised another Chokey Ghat of their own within one mile, on the left bank of Kupli and Kolong. The government demanded the abolition or removal of the Jaintia Ghat since the days of Mr. Scott who on April 13, 1830 had sent a letter upon this subject, his plea being that Jaintia was not legitimate to raise a Ghat so close to the Company's jurisdiction who had already raised one there. Constant reminders were sent but this demand was never complied with. The quarrel dragged on until the annexation of Jaintia in 1835.

The government also exploited the quarrels of Jaintia with Sheikh Raghoo with regard to the territorial jurisdiction over an area known as *Seven Reaches*. Although the Sylhet Frontier map of 1784 justified Jaintia's claims, the government had also laid down a plan to acquire the entire area under dispute in favour of returning suitable compensation to Jaintia.

The government manipulated to exploit the situation out of other internal quarrels in Jaintia. It was found that the Rajah had not handled matters smoothly. He had deprived U Kiang

nephew of Ram Singh from his office as manager of treasury who was a legitimate incumbent to that assignment, who now was thrown to prison while Maha Rajah an illegitimate substitution was put in his place. U Kiang under the prevalent usages should have succeeded Ram Singh but was deprived by Rajendra. U Kiang later on appealed to Lt. Hurry Inglis who intervened and got his release. Rajendra had also imprisoned Gopaul Munea Daloye G.M. to military commander at Thakreen temple, and he being fearful of being sacrificed to the goddess managed to escape to Sylhet in 1833.

The question of the renewal of the treaty meanwhile was receiving consistent government attention. Calculating the extent of this kingdom along with its population and two fertile plain tracts, the local officers were of the opinion that the annual gross revenue could not be less than Rupees 1,50,000 as would thus be utilised for the support of five companies of sepoy. Another report suggests that the gross revenue receipts totalled Rs. 30,000 plus rupees ten lakhs accumulated. Rajendra, however, objected to the ratification of this treaty on the ground that the treaty could not be assumed as matter of personal agreement and had to obtain the consent of the State Durbar comprising heads of *elakas* and nobles. He had no power to levy new taxes which would count to the tribute to be delivered as he could be placed to more dire consequences and he was under an impression that his people might rebel if he did so. Meanwhile, the local officers pressed that their demand should have been complied lest the treaty should lapse.

All these affairs being kept in suspense, the government pressed the Syiem to produce the culprits guilty of the charge for immolating the British subjects at the late sacrifice, to which the Gobha, a vicegerent was suspected to have had a hand in the matter. The Supreme Government having learnt of these affairs noted thus : "As long as the Jyntia Rajah pretended to be sovereign of Gobhah, he must be held responsible, otherwise the British Government would consider Gobhah as dissevered from his dominions and would approve such measures for the reduc-



tion of its refractory chief".<sup>1</sup> We have also been prone to believe that the Gobha king was acquainted to resorting to this awful practice since a long time past.

Rajendra, then very young, 17 or 18 years of age, had fallen victim to several court intrigues as relations had become so embittered among the Nartiang and Jowai Dalois who had taken up arms among themselves. The fact was that the Jowai Daloi posed himself as chief counsellor whereas other Dalois were deprived of their shares while the government de-recognition of the Rajah to officer-in-charge of Jaintia gave reasons to government to manipulate these internal intrigues.

Rajendra then young, simple and gentle could hardly control the refractory Dalois and in fact it was when the officers usurped of his kingdom, that he turned more violent, intriguing and war-like. But when he was sent in exile to Dacca, he developed a more spiritual bent of mind to attain consolation and salvation in his own way.

In the early part of 1834, the government was thus obliged to arbitrate in the local quarrels. Inglis was deputed to settle these problems by personally visiting the kingdom and assembling the Dalois with the Syiem, the outcome at the last phase was that disputes were settled, the Syiem assuring to restore the privileges the Dalois had enjoyed during the time of Ram Singh. All the Dalois except Jowai prior to Inglis' arrival were united in desisting Rajendra from maintaining his authority and had even put a stop to the Rajah's communication with six villages and other two above Dimurua and Ghobah. It appears that Rajendra was too weak to control or that he asserted undue authority to grant special privileges to his favoured few, whereas the East India Company cleverly exploited this situation and thus enforced the annexation of Jaintia in 1835 but in a situation like this, it was hard for any one else to escape committing mistakes being overwhelmed on one side by a few of his own counterparts and on the other by external pressure.

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<sup>1</sup>Foreign 1835 Deptt. Political Consultation April No. 14.

The Government of India, of course, had agreed that such an arbitration was thus justified lest the trouble should involve the tranquility of the Khasi District in which it was true that U Lorshon and U Sngap were wielding considerable influence.

In 1834, the government was also taxed with Jaintia pretensions over 'the country to the east of Kopili as far as the Borpani in modern Assam. The local Government, therefore, approved that the strip of land between the river Kopili the Borpani east and then the Kupling (Kolong) north could be made over but most of the land occupied between the Kuilling and Borpani containing the largest population had to be considered as all claims of the Cosseahs could be advanced within the feeders of the Kopili'.

Jenkins reported also to Secretary to the government of India that Jaintia did not give up her claims over her authority to levy duties in cotton and other produce by the Kopili and the Kullyng rivers. "The boundaries I have above proposed would give the Rajah a territory in a river front from the point at which the Kopili divided itself into two branches above its confluence with the Borpani by the branch that falls into Kullyng at Raha and by Kullyng to a little below Jargee where the southern branch of the Kopili unites also with the Kullyng."

A reply from the government is summed up this : "I concur generally in the time of boundary sketches . . . . .for Cachar and Jynteah but I would be satisfied to make the Kobbee our limit."

The matter dragged on. The Jaintia could had totally been unable to comply with the government demand to produce the culprits who had been really responsible for kidnapping the victims immolated at the human sacrifice. The Supreme Government, thereupon, issued a directive to the Agent on February 23, 1835 "to confiscate all the possessions of the Chief in the plains leaving him to exercise jurisdiction as before in such parts of territories as are situated in the hills. Captain Jenkins would accordingly be pleased to get in communication with Captain Lister to take possession of such parts of Rajah's territories in

<sup>1</sup>Foreign 1834 Department Political Proceedings consultation, 8 May No. 61-62.



the plains as bordered upon the district under the superintendence to which they should be considered as finally annexed : and orders will be issued through Commissioner at Dacca to the authorities to Sylhet and Cachar to pursue a similar course in regard to the tracts which bordered upon these districts." Lister was also required to work out the receipts for revenue as could be calculated.

William Bentinck, the Governor-General issued another promulgation thus :

"By this conduct you have incurred the penalty of which you were told in the year 1821, namely that you would render yourself liable if you fail to deliver any person which might after time perpetrate this horrible atrocity in your dominion. But I have contended myself on this occasion with ordering the confiscation of all your possessions of whatever description they may be, which are situated in the plain, and you will accordingly be pleased to make overcharge of them to the neighbouring authorities in the manner which Captain Lister shall direct you".<sup>1</sup> A warning was served against further attempts at kidnapping. The letter was dated February 23, 1835.

The government had, therefore, cleverly exploited the situation to accomplish their objective. The pre-annexation picture of internal Jaintia, however, was very different when compared with situations in the Khasi Hills. Internal schisms also had great effect and served as antecedents to the collapse of this great kingdom. It appears that the government had taken advantage of matters arising from boundary disputes and the kidnapping episode. It was a bolt from the blue when the news was heard of the annexation of the plain dominions.

Rajendra refused the British officer to be reinstated only in the hills. This led to the annexation of both the hills and plain sectors on which occasions Dopaty and Saldlar were annexed to Cachar district<sup>2</sup>, the twenty four Jaintia parganahs to Sylhet while the northern sector was merged into Nowgong. The Hills

<sup>1</sup> 10(b) 1835 volume of letters received from government, pp. 93-101.

<sup>2</sup> Latoo thanah was constructed at Doodpaty shortly after this event.

were consolidated into the Khasi hills district. The fact was that the Rajah refused to be treated as sovereign of a limited territory. It was when the annexation was enforced that the people came to their senses that it was at the cost of internal dissension that they had become so deprived of their kingdom. Rajendra was forced to become a pensioner for a monthly allowance of Rs. 500 per month and far more, he had lost his claims to revenue and other privileges to which the Jaintia Syiem was entitled since time immemorial. The Rajah since then was moved to Sylhet with the annexation, the British consolidation of a great part of this region became complete.

Pamberton in his book, *Eastern Frontier of British India*, tells that the plain tract was estimated to have an area of 3,850 square miles, Sylhet side being estimated to have a population of 1,50,000 souls of whom the greater number, were Mussulmans: . . . .Hindus of the Bengalee origin.

The annexation was carried out in which the plain territory was taken over. F. Jenkins, Agent to Governor General on April 15, 1835 informed the Secretary to the Government of Bengal that Captain Rutherford was deputed for taking over charge, had already passed through the districts occupied by us, and had been attended by all the Rajahs and Chiefs to whom he had issued such instructions as he considered necessary for the preservation of the peace of the country. He had already left for Nowgong leaving Lieutenant and Adjutant Begge of the Assam Light Infantry in the military charge of the new possessions. At Nowgong Captain Rutherford deputed Mr. Huggon to take civil charge and conduct such enquiries which would enable Captain Rutherford to make the necessary revenue assessment. Jenkins admitted the case of the Rajah and headmen of Gobha as follows : "I beg to take the opportunity to request the pleasure of Government in regard to the Rajah and headmen of Ghoba now in confinement here as accessories to the sacrifice of our subjects. As they acted under orders, they could not have disobeyed and nothing has been clearly proved against any individual. I presume the whole of them may be released".



W. H. Macnaughter, Secretary to Government of India, in reply, vide letter dated April, 27, 1835 approved of both the civil and military measures adopted to merge these territories into the government possessions.<sup>1</sup>

It is also interesting to note that the government in 1838 turned down Rajendra's application for restoration of Jaintia (in full) to him although the Supreme authorities considered the annexation of Jaintia as the greatest blunder. To quote from the relevant correspondence: "The confiscation of his territory has always appeared to us as a very summary measure and one of very doubtful propriety——. The confiscation of the territory of a native Prince is an act even when just and unavoidable, involving such serious consequence, that we desire that you will not on any future occasion have recognised so extreme a measure without previous reference to our authority".

Rajendra experienced a series of set-back toward his last days. He was confined in Sylhet in 1857 with U Kut Kongor, his brother in law. It was a paradox that in spite of this confinement, he offered in December 1857 to proceed to Hindustan with his own troops about 2,500 'Kukis, Khasis and Manipuris' to fight against the enemy of the government as 'I am bound to assist the Government agreeably to the Treaty No. 94 made on March 10, 1824' and 'should his Lordship be pleased to accept my service, then I beg an order to be passed to furnish me with steamers for conveyance of my troops and also to furnish them with muskets'. He had the letter written and signed in Bengali<sup>2</sup>

Rajendra also found himself engrossed with other difficulties as his own uncle, to whom the former had handed over charge of his property was making schemes to dispose him off his paternal estates 'on account of my attachment to Government'.

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<sup>1</sup>Judicial Deptt. General letters from court of Directors Foreign 39, 18 January—20 December 1854.

<sup>2</sup> 1857 Foreign Political Consultation, 13 November No. 138/175  
Joyuntza read Jaintiapur.

Cilhet read Sylhet.

The way in which Rajendra argued forth to plead innocence appears to have been strongly influenced by the Jaintiapur or Sylhet usage.

Rajendra was deprived of all his means. His opponents had intrigued with 'my adversary the Rajah of Assam handing over to him my personal property—gold mohurs and rupees'. The Ex-Syiem appealed to the authorities 'to seize and retain . . . . .under their charge all my house and property at Joyuntza and Cilhet and the whole of my movable and immovable property also a zamindari in the latter district, purchased by me . . . . .altogether with my gold mohurs and rupees, gold and silver furnishing, pair *quzzutty*, my hand ornaments horse, and other equippages . . . . .By another letter the ex-Syiem pleaded innocence against suspicion in any involvement with the mutiny : 'In conclusion I would beg to state for your information that if His Lordship will allow me to appear before His Lordship in Council where I dare say, I could declare all my particulars and free myself from any charge.'

Discontent loomed large among the Jaintias. The reasons were many. The royal families resented the loss of crown-lands and zamindaris. A police station instituted at Jowai was looked upon as a symbol of intrusion. But what irritated the people most was the imposition of a stamp duty and a house tax. This led to an uprising in March to April 1860 in which raids were perpetrated into Sylhet District in consequence of which three Police Stations were destroyed. It was learnt that thousands of the insurrectionaries joined this movement. However the Sylhet authorities coordinated action with the authorities from Sohra and Dacca and the movement soon was quelled. By the close of April, order was established. During the insurrection, information was collected that the raids conducted in the plain were intended to capture Rajendra and placed him on the throne. Suspicion gained ground and the government, therefore, ordered that Rajendra should be under close watch. Later it was proposed that he should be removed away from Sylhet as his presence might continually sustain the rebels in this field. The ex-Syiem when the matter was conveyed to him, sent up the protest furnished in a letter dated May 4, 1860 as follows :<sup>1</sup> "It is with

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<sup>1</sup>1860-61 Dacca Commissioner's File (Sylhet Papers) No. 33 No. 147.



the deepest regret that in conformity with your order, we have been ordered by this magistrate of the district, to proceed to Dacca within a week on account of the recent disturbances created by the Hill tribes.

“I have never ever thought of rebelling against the Government which has been so gracious to me as to grant me a pension of Rs. 500 p.m. for my maintenance, etc. I have when my territory was taken by the Government voluntarily resigned my Guddee without a murmur, and attended to the instructions issued on me by the Government besides which I pay revenue to the Government for the land I hold....

“In the year 1857 when the Chittagong mutineers made a rush towards Sylhet, the members of the Board of Revenue directed that neither myself and no Kooar (brother in law) should be removed to Jynteah from Sylhet but afterwards when it appeared that we have no hand in the matter, that officer directed me not to proceed to Jynteah our native country.

“In the current year when we were in our residence, we were informed of the misconduct of the Hill tribes and we immediately left Jynteah and proceeding to Sylhet, we informed that Magistrate and other authorities of the misconduct, and the Joint Magistrate who went down with a detachment of native troops punished the invaders. Under these circumstances it can be easily imagined that if we have a hand in the matter or even were connected with it or intended to it being carried on, we would not have reported the matter to the civil authority almost immediately.

“Should an enquiry be made and explanation called for, from the Joint Magistrate, it will be clearly proved that that officer never found aught against us while investigating into the conduct of these invaders.

“I am confident that none of the residents of this place has reported anything against my character and if any has done so, have done it maliciously and out of revenge.

“Certain decrees of the Civil Court had been executed for the sake of my zamindary of Purganah Banas Gotch for the satis-

faction of the demand of Rs. 80,000. To settle these affairs, my presence is essentially necessary at Sylhet.

“I have an old sister, a niece and her younger sister and besides these many females who solely depend upon me. They have none to look after in my absence and I am confident my departure from here will reduce them to a great poverty and misery and what befalls on them in my absence, I know not. . . .

“I humbly pray that after due consideration you will be pleased to cancel your orders. . . .”

The order for his deportation was withheld for some time. But finally the government reverted to their previous decision and it was during the winter time of 1860-61 that the old deposed Rajah was moved to Dacca. Since his removal, more troubles brewed leading to the outbreak of the third movement.

It was Mr. Rowlatt, Deputy Commissioner, at Sohra who pressed that Rajendra should be deported against the views of many officers such as Balfour who recommended that he should be relieved of the punishment since there was no concrete evidence to prove that he participated at the First War of Independence which occurred in 1857.

Rajendra like Tirot Singh spent the rest of his life time in exile. Not long after he passed away on April 29, 1862, he died as a true martyr. But worse he passed away in confinement, severed from his country to which he was so much dedicated. So at Dacca both Tirot Singh and Rajendra who were the illustrious martyrs of Meghalaya breathed their last.

And so the road construction permitted by Ram Singh brought about the same consequence as it was in the Khasi Hills. Rajendra suffered in the same way as Bor Manik, U Muken and Tirot Singh his brother Syiems underwent being sent away from their home to spend rest of their lives in exile, being placed to the same position.

Rajendra would have recollected how Tirot Singh, with his kinsmen, was confined in the metropolis of modern Bangladesh. He died without being honoured and last respect paid to him. He breathed his last without a relative or a beloved friend by his



side. He was trying to draw a spiritual consolation but perhaps he had received the news before he died, that U Kiang Nongbah, U Bang Daloi, U Myllon Daloi and other valiant Kiangs or Dalois had risen in arms and had waged war with the government in their contest for supremacy in their own land with the initial successes attained, that was in 1862. Some say he was allowed to proceed to Calcutta in search of a spiritual solace. The pension granted to him was continued to two more successors, his own nephew and grand nephew. One branch of his family embraced Christianity, one of his nephews being Rev Khnong, who was very vocal in propagating Christianity (Presbyterian type) in Sohra state. His scions are still at Jowai and other places.

We get some glimpses of the repercussion of the movement at the time when the survey was conducted at the instance of Lt. Colonel J. C. Houghton, Agent to the Governor General for acquiring lands at Upper Shillong when the government had decided to fix District Head Quarters at Shillong in 1861. Capt. B. W. Morton was then Deputy Commissioner. The Myllem Raja Bahadur, U Meelay had consented to hand over plots of land and provided men to assist Rissonrode, a Surveyor. Progress was made by the survey but further approaches nearer to the present Shillong town created apprehension and the Myllem party withdrew in 1861-62. Rissonrode anticipated that the Raja Bahadur, had "reason to believe that the Raja and his Myntris entertained a suspicion that this country would be annexed". The movement under Kiang Nongbah had thus: "the proximity of his territory to the scene of the late disturbances, renders it all important to avoid causing of dissatisfaction of his subjects". The Southerners, the tradition says, when the movement was started, assisted the Jaintias by blocking the communication, laying ambushes and creating havocs on Sohra-Jaintiapur and Jowai road.

The Jaintias persisted in the battle for four years (1860-63) to exert pressure upon the British government. As in the case of Tirot Singh, the government adopted both diplomatic and punitive measures to subjugate the freedom-fighters. The disturbances

had such an impact upon the administration of the neighbouring districts that the government deputed Brigadier-General Showers with 2,000 soldiers mostly Sikh to suppress the warriors in April 1862, about the same date when a captive King, Rajendra, was about to breath his last. Thus in April 1862, Brigadier-General Showers (G.B.) was appointed the Commissioner of Khosseah and Jynteah Hills and assumed charge of the office at his Headquarters, Jowai Poonjee. "The Government have decreed that Act XVI of 1857 be brought into force in the Khosseah and Jynteah Hills and Brigadier-General Showers calls on those who are friends of order and loyal subjects to the British Government to assist him in restoring the peace of the District". The other inhabitants of the district were warned, those who sheltered the rebels, supplied them with provisions or in any way assisted them as would render themselves liable to the penalties of the Act. The people should present their grievances rightly as the law directed who should then be listend to "but no complaint will be received so long as they are there in a state of insurrection".<sup>1</sup> But the guerrilla and tactics of warfare launched by the Jaintias were so effective that they stirred confusion to the British camps and thus prolonged the war. The Jaintias stormed and destroyed all British creations at Jawai with the result that several families of loyal subjects fled for shetter to the Khasi Hills. The government obtained also the help of Khyrim and Sohra Syiems to arbitrate on their behalf. Even after U Kiang Nongbah was hanged; the warriors continued to persist before it took some time for the government to re-establish their position. Mounted over-the scaffold on December 30, 1862, U Kiang Nongbah made his dying words : "If my face turns to sunrise when I die, my country would become free, but if to the sunset, the contrary." When he died, his head faced towards the east, and we may say that this prophacy was accomplished with India's attainment of Independence on August 15, 1947.

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<sup>1</sup> 1862, commissioner's office (F) file No. 408 Ac.



## Tirot Singh's Influence in Social History

THE FREEDOM FIGHTERS had foreseen not only the political subjugation but other social reverses by the coming of the British administration. They saw a series of change which would be disastrous to their social system, laws, customs and institutions. In this manner, this process of change was working out since the advent of the administration, and the establishment of a headquarters at Cherra Punji (Sohra). Soon after U Tirot Singh's fall, the people had to acquaint themselves with the new conditions. The wars had considerably taxed upon their energy and resources. The government took several measures to train them up to the new regime. It was at the great cost of British labours that the local inhabitants were gradually taking themselves to a settled way of life.

Christianity came simultaneously with the administration. For in 1812, when rudimentary relations started, Krishna Chandra Pal of the Serampore Baptist Mission, for the first time, converted two Khasis at Panduah Market in the presence of Six Syiems and a large crowd. The Mission followed up this by the translation of *St. Mathew* into Khasi which was printed in 1816-17 in the Bengali script. In 1831 at the height of the war, the New Testament in Khasi was published. The Mission supported two Khasi students to study at Serampore College in 1818 whereas in 1830 three Khasi princes went to study there. The Mission opened its branch in 1833 at Sohra which, however, was abandoned in 1838. The Welsh Presbyterian Mission took

off this field in 1841. The example of the Welsh Church was emulated by several other missions notably Roman Catholic of the several denominations later on. The Shillong Metropolis in particular had attracted such pursuits and activities. At first many persons were considerably opposed to become Christians but later on they gave way. In rendering Khasi to writing, the Welsh Mission switched off from the Bengali to the Roman alphabet which is in use till today.

In these circumstances, the changes followed one another in rapid succession. They made their effect into the community system of education in which syllabus of a wide range covered training in war-like arts, Council sitting and Oratory, learning of art of dance and music, stone pulling and megalithic creations, other sports and games, rituals and sacrifices, craftsmanship and other aspects. The people were of robust constitution and of some physical strength and vigour owing to the constant muscular exertions. Women acted as custodians of family property and rituals. With the process of the consolidation, the people were gradually abandoning their traditional way of life. There was a gradual departure from using their weapons featured by sword and spear combats. Only archery survived which of course was more a game of skill than of muscular exercise. Thus the people slowly became greatly reduced in physique and their imposing martial appearance. The records suggest that the warriors were good archers. Besides they used arrows and spears at the different religious ceremonies. The arrows were of many kinds. However, arrows used were assigned to different purposes such as sports, warfare and ceremonial. Different spears and shields were also used for different purposes. Warriors took their bows of extra-ordinary size which had a long range. It is said that Mon Bhut's bow was of immense size and according to tradition, it was taken by the government for preservation at the Dacca's museum. They used them also for game.

Besides the above, they also used arms. It is interesting to note that the Khyrim Raja was in possession of canons. Later they were handled over to the government. Several clang at



Bhoi, south and west were known to have manufactured guns sold to Sylhet and Assam. Samples are still to be seen there. A tradition says that some of them were captured from the Jaintias. During the Anglo-Jaintia war in 1862, U Kiang Nongbah used a canon at Shangpur. Mon Bhut and Kiang Nongbah possessed fire-locks which were used during the battles fought with the English men.

Artilleries of indigenous worksmanship were known as *Ramshangki*, *Suloi tynsah* (muzzle-loading guns) and *Suloi Khyndew* (which appeared to be like flint-locks). The gun powder was made from sulphur, salt-peter and charcoal.

Many of them have become obsolete and the people have switched off to the use of modern fire-arms. The aconite arrow heads and spear heads were also used.

The change thus affected the household organisation, for since warfare was over, women took more liberty whereas the avuncular authority of the uncles was broken down. The old usage insisted on women to adhere strictly to their position as caretakers of the house and custodians of the religion whose task carried much sanctity. The freedom fighters possibly saw to such a drastic change because such signs had appeared even during the road construction at Nongkhlaw. Subsequently with the progress of Christian conversion, women stepped down from their previous positions whereas they maintained their rights as inheritors to family property. In the past women were always under the supervision of their uncles and never moved out without an escort or males. The age-old isolation was broken down. Many primeval traits, incentives, features received a set-back.

The change affected the traditional polity likewise. In course of time, the Durbars lost their vigour and vitality. With this, there was a decline in the standard of debates and decorum. The Durbars usually functioned to provide community discipline but in view of the change, they became less effective. In course of time, judicial Durbars and trial by jury became more insignificant. This was also because of the usurpation of the State powers.



Arduous undertakings such as stone raising, construction of stone monuments, pulling of heavy pillars became more and more decreased. Some of the folk-arts disappeared. Many colourful folk-tales, proverbs, and fables passed to oblivion. Dance and Music at places were forgotten. The change although largely evolutionary took its roots from the process of urbanisation, spread of Christianity, administrative orientation emergence of new trade structure and role of social contacts. The process of change started with the establishment of headquarters at Sohra (Cherrapunjee) and it gathered more momentum after the headquarters was shifted to Shillong in 1864. The change in physical, cultural and social aspects became perceptible since then.

With the expansion of British administration, iron smelting in which thousand of families received a good income also faced its death-blow since the government introduced a cheaper iron from the plain in which the local smelters could not stand competition. The British government deliberately brought a cheaper stuff with a view to suppressing the weapon forged at the black-smithies. Prior to the government advent, several iron goods, pig-iron and steel were exported alongwith mica and copper. The loss to some extent was compensated by an increased potato cultivation. Weaving works and goldsmithy also suffered. Other ancient skills and trades were gradually decreasing. Other implements, furnitures, utensils were slowly being made up with new substitutes.

The confiscation of the plain dominions largely affected the Rajas who used to draw a revenue both in kind and cash besides obtaining good supply of loom-crafts, cattle, hides, ivory and other products. In the long run it led to the extinction of primeval traditional and cultural traits.

The freedom fighters were alive to these difficulties as they felt sure that the consolidation of British power would bring about such an upsurge. But their dreams perished and they felt victims to this fate.

In course of time, the people were gradually settled down to the new administration and slowly took advantage of the educa-



tional facilities and a uniform administration introduced by the government. The change to some extent is also innovative.

But opposition constantly mounted up to the new regime. This was the reason why the Jaintias rose up in arms. It was an independence movement which was intended to keep out the British administrators forever. It also had great effect and presented several difficulties to the administration. U Kiang Nongbah was an arch leader in company with Giri Daloi of Shangpung, Suwar Daloi of Sutnga, Bang Daloi of Nartiang and a great number of patriots. But it was finally subjugated and a chapter was closed down.

With its collapse, the government shifted the district headquarters from Cherra to Shillong in 1864-66 which in 1874 became the capital of the Chief Commissioner of Assam.

The freedom movement started by Tirot Singh brought about such changes having both evolutionary and revolutionary trends depending upon the situations and the type of response made to them. The Khasi-Jaintia movement ushered in a series of transformation which took over the whole of this region. One good aspect was that the British regime had built something to promote integration on the basis of constitutionalism and a uniform administration, education and urbanisation in spite of a diverse traditional background. So such changes had both good and adverse results.

Thus Tirot Singh's liberation movement was really epoch-making since it coincided with such changes which started to make their appearance into the Khasi-Jaintia Hills.

## APPENDIX

### I

#### U. TIROT SINGH MEMORIAL

Nothing concrete was done during the British rule to perpetuate the memory of this great hero. Only something was heard from the tradition about some of his works. Concrete schemes to set-up his memorial, however, were formulated after the independence of India.

In 1952, the people of Nongkhlaw resolved to set up his memorial. All local resources were tapped to that effect. As a result of these efforts, the foundation laying ceremony was held at Mairang, headquarters of Nongkhlaw Syiemship on December 15, 1952 by Shri Jairamdas Doulatram, Governor of Assam. The late Kedro Manick Singh, the then Syiem and other dignitaries took immense interest to set up such a memorial. An extract from the opening address reads thus : "For this purpose, these thousands of faces, glowing with joy and gratitude, have assembled here today. They have thought that the memory should be kept alive by a monument. . . . . We dedicate our work to the spirit of national independence and wish that the light of peace may rest upon it forever".

"With little or no arms, U Tirot Singh dared the armed might of the British. He had able generals in the persons of U Mon Bhut, U Lorshon Jarain and U Khein Konger whose skill, personal bravery and speed struck terror to the British. They adopted guerrilla tactics and were here, there and everywhere harassing and annihilating the enemy, so much so that the illusive U Mon Bhut earned the name of U Bhut (devil), U Tirot Singh earned even the praise of the British as a gallant enemy."<sup>1</sup>

The Governor replied : "The people . . . . have done the most appropriate thing in deciding to put up a memorial in honour

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<sup>1</sup> Opening address on the occasion of the foundation laying ceremony of a memorial to U Tirot Singh on December 15, 1952 at Mairang pp. 1-2.



of U Tirot Singh. His name should be ever remembered by the coming generations of the Khasis and Jaintias as that of a brave man who stood for principles and sacrificed his all for the sake of those principles. This is a great virtue which should be an ideal for a man like Tirot Singh in that those who come after him should develop his good qualities and thus continue the traditions of high spiritual which he has left behind. . . . If justice is to be done to his memory, it is desirable that a proper biography of his should be written in Khasi, Assamese and English languages and be also made available to the people outside Assam. What the British officials have written about him is only a part of the picture. We must know his history from his own people also.

“A proper memorial should be in many forms. You have selected a good form in putting a solid monument in stone which will stand forever. . . . . The second memorial of his should be in the form of a very good biography written after collecting from the aged people among the Khasis all the stories and incidents of U Tirot Singh’s life which should come down to the people of the present day . . . . . The third memorial should be, as you have suggested, in the form of activity which benefits the village people of this region”.

The foundation laying ceremony was followed by cultural celebrations, and was signalled with drum-beats and pipings in keeping with the traditional usage to symbolise laying down the stone memorial.

The construction of this memorial was over. The unveiling ceremony then was performed on March 29, 1954 by Jairamdas Doulatram, the Governor. It was a great occasion when the near and distant kinsmen of this hero assembled to witness this solemn ceremony. The function also attracted a number of visitors from outside. Besides the Governor, Mr. Medhi, then Chief Minister also addressed the meeting. The people were jubilant that after the lapse of 120 years, the memorial to perpetuate the memory of their hero was constructed. The people were reminded about the Nongkhlaw’s history, her enchanting

institutions and democratic traditions against the background of her scenic beauty and her immense resource—how the blacksmiths and iron smelters once filled the desolate hills and jungles with the music of the hammers beating upon the anvils. The unvailing ceremony being over, the dancing troupes displayed a colourful folk dance against the background of music that resounded on that day. An extract from the Governor's speech is 'Tirof Singh has bequeathed to the Khasis and Jaintias the tradition of a broad outlook and of brave deeds. I hope the young men of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills will live up to the great tradition U Tirof Singh left for future generations'.

The memorial rests in a sleeping valley of Mairang and recalls the passers-by how Tirof Singh sacrificed his life in fighting for the cause of his motherland and his countrymen.

The inscription on the monument reads thus :

**Sacred to the memory**

**Of U Tirof Singh,**

**Syiem of Nongkhlaw State,**

**Who people and the country.**

**His People and the Country.**

**This is my own country,**

**The country, our forefathers have**

**Shed their blood.**

Since the unveiling ceremony, nothing more significant was done to immortalise the hero in a befitting manner. All the schemes so far drawn up and executed much as setting up of Village schools and clubs to his memory were largely commemorative but on a local scale. A death anniversary of this hero was normally observed on March, 29. The date is not suitable since he died prior to March, 29, 1834 whereas on that day, U Rijon, his successor was installed. It is an official holiday of the State Government. It is on this day that folk dances and memorial forums were held at Mairang whereas at Shilong,



besides public meeting, archery competitions were observed. It was considered appropriate to have such functions to commemorate him. However, these measures would not suffice. More subsequently it was considered necessary to make up this lacuna by setting up a statue at Shillong, the State capital.

With this incentive, a few leading persons convened a public meeting at Khasi National Durbar Hall, Shillong on April 22, 1977 which resolved to constitute Tirot Singh Commemorative Committee to draw up suitable schemes for installation of his status. So certain schemes were laid down for fund raising, publicity and other matters. At this juncture, the committee felt it appropriate to invite the Prime Minister to a special commemoration function of Tirot Singh as would be fixed in August, 1977. The State government and other authorities were moved to extend full cooperation after it was announced that the Prime Minister had accepted the invitation.

On August 17, 1977, a General Coordination Committee was held in which three Ministers and other dignitaries were present. This Committee chalked out the final arrangements regarding publicity, transport, fund raising, ground arrangement and other matters. On August 18, a joint committee for transport was held. Publicity was intensified, a large number of volunteers came to join hands to cope with this affair. The Khasi National Durbar became an active avenue for making all preparations. It was an auspicious occasion to welcome the Prime Minister who had kindly consented to come over to Shillong to pay homage to an immortal hero, U Tirot Singh. The venue for the celebration was fixed at the Garrison Grounds, Shillong.

Shillong was jubilant and rose on August 22, 1978 to witness a unique occasion when a Memorial of Tirot Singh was stepped up to the circle of the most brilliant national freedom fighters. People from all nooks and corners thronged to Shillong, arches and gates were stood erect; large procession of young people carried placards and banners to Garrison Grounds to welcome the Prime Minister and salute Tirot Singh. Decorations

were decked at passages leading to the ground.

It was arranged that the Prime Minister reached Shillong by a helicopter from Gauhati and a large number of dignitaries went to the Upper Shillong helipad to receive him. Since the weather was unfavourable, the helicopter could not land at Upper Shillong but instead it made way to Umroi Airport where it landed. The Prime Minister immediately came to Shillong by road. The message received, all the people rushed back to Shillong but by that time, the Prime Minister had already entered the Raj Bhavan. The meeting could not, therefore, start in time.

The special commemoration of Tirot Singh thus commenced. Reaching the ground, a traditional welcome dance was performed. After garlanding, the Prime Minister passed on to the rostrum. The Chairman of the Tirot Singh Memorial Reception Committee<sup>1</sup> opened the function. Welcoming him the Chairman expressed his sense of appreciation and conveyed his people's thanks to the Prime Minister for taking this trouble to come a long way to Shillong and share with the people these solemn festivities. It was hoped that the occasion would serve the purpose of promoting integration with the rest of the country. The Commemoration Memorial Committee arranged this celebration to focus the image of this great personage on the national level. He reminded that the hills and valleys of Shillong once provided a strategy to Tirot Singh and Bor Manick where an arduous struggle was conducted against the British government.

The presentation address, was delivered by Lakyntiew Swell Richmond. An extract from it reads :

“The collapse of the Jaintia revolt was the watershed that saw the departure of political freedom from these hills for nearly nine decades. Our first date with modern history was under evil stars. But we take pride from the fact that stirrings for freedom hero preceded our first war of independence of 1857 by well over a quarter of century. We also derived consolation from the knowledge that if we suffered with rest of India and we did not disgrace ourselves. And when this country regained

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<sup>1</sup>The author of this biography himself happened to be the Chairman.



her freedom in 1947 we shared in its pride and its hero for a better and fuller life.

“Because of this, your presence with us here today to pay homage to one of our greatest sons, acquires a special significance. We consider it our another date with history but this time under happy stars. From today Tirot Singh, Kiang Nongbah and others who have gone and whom we revere are no longer mere local names but belong to the galaxy of national heroes. Its repercussions will be wide and far reaching and will echo in the corridors of history.”<sup>1</sup>

Speaking on the occasion Prof. G. G. Swell, said “Mr. Morarji Desai’s visit would help create an atmosphere free from fear and give new direction to the people of North East-India.”<sup>2</sup>

Paying glowing tributes to the memory of the Martyr, the Prime Minister said : “Tirot Singh was the hero not only of this region but of all freedom loving people of the world . . . . It was the duty of all Indians to enrich the culture they had inherited from their ancestors”.<sup>3</sup> He urged on the people to rise above narrow regional considerations and “help the Centre fulfil its commitment to lay a solid foundation of national unity based on truth and freedom”.<sup>4</sup> He also laid stress on “peaceful coexistence among all sections of people in the country which had been able to preserve its ancient culture through thousands of years.” Mr. W.A. Sangma, Chief Minister at the close, offered the vote of thanks.

In and between the speeches, cultural programmes with the band of music, Garo Grikka dance, Khasi songs were presented.

The celebration had that much of its grandeur and solemnity. It is believed that it will have its impact not only in perpetuating the memory of the hero but in channelling different lines of nation building.

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<sup>1</sup>The Address was signed by the Chairman and the Secretary, Mr. C. H. Lyngdoh.

<sup>2</sup>Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 23, 1977.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, August 23, 1977.

<sup>4</sup>Assam Tribune, August 23, 1977.

APPENDIX II

EPITAPH  
OF  
U TIROT SINGH  
AT  
MAIRANG

KA JINGKYNMAW BUROM IA  
U TIROT SINGH

U SYIEM KA HIMA NONGKHLAW UBA LA AI LA KA JINGIM  
NA KA BYNTA BAN IADA IA KA *JINGLAITLUID* KI KHUN KI  
HAJAR BAD IA LA KA RI. U LA IAP HA DACCA HAPOH  
BYNDI.....

“KANE KA DEI KA RI JONG NGA,  
KA RI UMSNAM U KNII U KPA”.

(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

TO THE SACRED MEMORY OF  
U TIROT SINGH

THE SYIEM OF NONGKHLAW STATE WHO GAVE HIS LIFE TO  
PROTECT THE FREEDOM OF HIS COUNTRY  
DIED IN JAIL AT DACCA.....

“THIS IS MY OWN MY NATIVE LAND, THE LAND  
CONSECRATED WITH BLOOD OF MY ANCESTORS”.





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